**Christ Church of the Rio Grande Valley**

**LAY SEMINARY**

**MODULE ONE: Hermeneutics**

**Weeks 1-2 (Introduction to Hermeneutics & Canonical Formation)**

**WEEK ONE:**

1. **Read “Chapter Three: Interpreting Scripture” from *The Portable Seminary*.** This is background reading to prepare for the canon article. If you happen to have any questions or insights stemming from the background reading, we can discuss them in person.

**Suggested time: 30 minutes\***

1. **Read “Introduction to the Canon” by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.** This is the seminary-level article. Don’t worry about mastering it. Before you read each section, read the corresponding guiding questions to aid your comprehension, engagement, and retention. I put a wider margin on the right for you to take notes of anything you may want to put in your reflection paper.

**Suggested time: 60 minutes\***

**WEEK TWO:**

1. **Write a 1-3 page (double spaced) journal response.** Don’t spend more than 1-2 paragraphs summarizing or doing “what I found interesting.” Use **SAMPLE PROMPTS** below. You’ll read this aloud during our meeting.

**Suggested time: 90 minutes\***

***EXTRA CREDIT: – What is the position of the Anglican Church on a) the canon of scripture, b) the authoritative relationship between Church and Scripture (does one dominate?), and c) the Deuterocanon.***

*\*These times should be more than enough for the comprehension level I would expect is required to write a reflection paper and have a fruitful in-person discussion. Feel free to spend more time on all this, but* ***only*** *if it is not taking you away from other obligations like family, work, and Sabbath!*

**GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR HARRINGTON ARTICLE**

**AGAIN, please don’t answer these (unless you are using it as a journal response prompt).**

**Just read them before and during your reading so to aid your comprehension, engagement, and retention.**

**INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL**

1. How does one apply scripture as a “canon” of life?

**THE SHAPE OF THE CANON(S) TODAY**

1. Does the arrangement of biblical books matter?
2. Why might it be too simplistic to distinguish between a “Catholic” Bible and a “Christian” or “Protestant” bible?

**HISTORY OF THE OT CANON**

1. What is the relation between “canon” and Council?
2. If you were banished to a remote island and could only take one Old Testament book and one New Testament book with you, which of each would you choose and why?
3. Are there any books of the Bible that should *not* be read isolated from the others?
4. What is the canonical significance of the Qumran community?
5. What is the significance of the Septuagint?
6. How did Jews react to the Christian use of the Septuagint?
7. Briefly outline the history of “deuterocanonical” books and their significance.
8. Protestant Reformers insisted on the principle of *sola scriptura*. What significance for the canon?

**HISTORY OF THE NT CANON**

1. What Bible was used by the Church in the first few centuries A.D.?
2. Did Paul know he was writing scripture?
3. Why did the gospel writers write? Why did Paul write?
4. What’s the deal with Hebrews?
5. Describe the two historical forces that facilitated the development of a New Testament canon of scripture.
6. What were the major operative criteria for deciding what was in and what was out of the New Testament.
7. If Jesus came today instead of 2,000 years ago, do you imagine a canon of New Testament scripture would have resulted? If so, when? And do you think the same criteria would apply regarding what would make it into a canon?
8. What is the significance of the Muratorian Canon? Was it the final word?
9. What impact did Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea have on canonical formation?
10. What other early scriptural canons existed? How were they similar? How were they different?
11. At what point chronologically would you say the canon was solidified?
12. What did Martin Luther argue about Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation? What other significance did Luther have in the canonical discussion?
13. Are some biblical books more important than others? (Is there really a “canon within the canon?”)
14. What is the significance of the Council of Trent?

**THEOLOGICAL ISSUES**

1. What potential ecumenical/evangelistic/apologetic problems stem from the use of “Old Testament” to refer to the Hebrew Bible?
2. What potential theological/doctrinal problems stem from the use of “Old Testament” to refer to the Hebrew Bible?
3. Is there an original Hebrew translation and an original Greek translation?
4. Do you think every book was written by its purported author? Why?
5. Do we have an original copy of each book? Why is/isn’t this important?
6. Describe the significance of each deuterocanonical book.
7. Which deuterocanonical book does the author believe is most significant among them? Which one do you believe is most significant? Why do you agreed/disagree with Harrington?
8. May the Church add books to the canon of Scripture? What would be the “best” argument someone might try to advance for potentially adding a book to the Biblical canon? What is the best argument to keep the canon frozen forever? Which side wins?
9. May the Church subtract books from the canon of Scripture? What would be the “best” argument someone might try to advance for potentially removing a book from the Biblical canon? What is the best argument to keep the canon frozen forever? Which side wins?
10. Harrington writes, “[T]here is so much [theological] diversity [within the canon] that according to some the canon has been the principle of disunity, not of unity, in the churches.” Agree? Disagree? If so, what solution?
11. Are some books more important than others? Why?
12. “Various Christian groups have paid more attention to some biblical books than others.” Can you think of an example? What result?
13. “There are materials (for example, the NT ‘household codes’ . . .) that seem quaint or shocking or even monstrous to Westerners today.” How do you handle this? Why?
14. What is the significance of the relationship between the canon of Scripture and the Church? Does one dominate?
15. What is the Roman Catholic Church’s position on the relationship between Scripture and the Church?
16. Describe a criticism of the canon that has been advanced based on historical research. How do you respond to it?
17. What is canonical criticism? What steps does it involve?
18. What objections might you raise regarding canonical criticism?
19. If you were preaching on Psalms, how could you use canonical criticism to develop your sermon?
20. If you were preaching on Acts, Colossians, or Revelation (select only one), how could you use canonical criticism to develop your sermon on that book?

**SAMPLE PROMPTS**

**You can use your whole journal response to answer ONE prompt in great detail, ALL the prompts very briefly, or, like a good Anglican, something in the middle of those two extreme fringes (pick a few). Of course, brilliant minds like yours can tie prompts together and answer them in tandem with each other.**

**Be ready for me to challenge whatever you say, even if it is perfectly orthodox.**

**(Good practice in case you ever have to talk to people from Austin, TX.)**

1. Does the arrangement of biblical books within the canon matter?
2. Why might it be too simplistic to distinguish between a “Catholic” Bible and a “Christian” or “Protestant” bible?
3. If you were banished to a remote island and could only take one Old Testament book and one New Testament book with you, which of each would you choose and why?
4. Are there any books of the Bible that should *not* be read isolated from the others?
5. Protestant Reformers insisted on the principle of *sola scriptura*. What significance for the canon?
6. Did Paul know he was writing scripture?
7. If Jesus came today instead of 2,000 years ago, do you imagine a canon of New Testament scripture would have resulted? If so, when? And do you think the same criteria would apply regarding what would make it into a canon?
8. At what point chronologically would you say the canon was solidified?
9. What potential ecumenical/evangelistic/apologetic problems stem from the use of “Old Testament” to refer to the Hebrew Bible?
10. What would be the “best” argument someone might try to advance for potentially adding a book to the Biblical canon? What is the best argument to keep the canon frozen forever? Which side wins? Why?
11. Harrington writes, “[T]here is so much [theological] diversity [within the canon] that according to some the canon has been the principle of disunity, not of unity, in the churches.” Agree? Disagree? If so, what solution?
12. Are some books more important than others? Why?
13. “Various Christian groups have paid more attention to some biblical books than others.” Name an example and describe the results.
14. “There are materials (for example, the NT ‘household codes’ . . .) that seem quaint or shocking or even monstrous to Westerners today.” How do you handle this? Why?
15. What is the significance of the relationship between the canon of Scripture and the Church? Does one dominate?
16. What is canonical criticism? What steps does it involve?
17. If you were preaching on Psalms, how could you use canonical criticism to develop your sermon?
18. If you were preaching on Acts, Colossians, or Revelation (select only one), how could you use canonical criticism to develop your sermon on that book?