



THE PONTIFICAL FACULTY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
Dominican House of Studies  
Washington, D.C.

**MASTER OF ARTS (THEOLOGY)**  
**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

1. Structure of the Examination

This is a three-hour written examination in which the candidate for the Master of Arts (Theology) will be asked to write on three themes (theses), *one each from the assigned areas of sacred Scripture, systematic theology and moral theology*. In each area the candidate will be able to choose from three possible questions.

2. Purpose of the Examination

The principal purpose of the examination is to test the candidate's ability to expose an understanding of theological principles as he/she orders those principles toward a reasoned theological judgment or conclusion.

3. Grading of the Examination

a. The following grades may be assigned for each part of the written exam:

A (4.0); A- (3.75); B+ (3.5); B (3.0); B- (2.75); C+ (2.5); C (2.0); C- (1.75); F (0).

The grade for the examination is the average of the three grades submitted by the examiners. Each examiner will assign a grade evaluating only those sections of the examination which he or she administered. An average grade of 3.0 is needed to successfully pass the exam. No student will be admitted to the defense of the M.A. thesis without having passed the comprehensive examination. The grade received on the comprehensive examination will be available from the Office of the Registrar. Candidates may not continue candidacy after two failures of the comprehensive examination

b. Honor grades are computed according to the following method:

Coursework: 60%

Examination: 15%

Thesis & Defense Average: 25%

The honor grades are:

*Summa cum laude* (3.9-4.0)      *Magna cum laude* (3.7-3.89)      *Cum laude* (3.5-3.69)

Current Themes Approved by the Council of the Faculty: September 14, 2015

## **I. SACRED SCRIPTURE**

## **Theme 1: Pentateuch**

- I.** The basic outline and story line of the Pentateuch
  - A.** geographical/literary setting of each book
  - B.** chronology of the stay at Mount Sinai
  - C.** significance of Sinai narrative: holiness, cult and priesthood, covenant, law, ordering of society
  
- II.** The Book of Genesis
  - A.** sources in Genesis
  - B.** outline
  - C.** Abraham and Jacob cycles
  - D.** covenants with Abraham
  - E.** Joseph story
  
- III.** The Book of Exodus
  - A.** Call of Moses
  - B.** Passover
  - C.** Sinai and the ancient Near Eastern covenant formulary
  - D.** the Golden Calf and the intercession of Moses
  
- IV.** The Book of Leviticus
  - A.** Structure of the book
  - B.** Priesthood
  - C.** Holiness Code
  
- V.** The Book of Numbers
  - A.** Structure of the book
  - B.** Priestly blessing
  - C.** Balaam
  
- VI.** The Book of Deuteronomy
  - A.** historical origin; discovery of the scroll in Josiah's reign
  - B.** structure of the book
  - C.** Hear O Israel
  - D.** major themes and rhetorical style
  - E.** death of Moses and conclusion of Pentateuch
  - F.** Tetrateuch, Pentateuch, or Hexateuch
  
- VII.** Theory of the J E D P sources
  - A.** principal criteria for identifying them
  - B.** the date and historical setting of each source
  - C.** characteristics and theological themes of the Priestly Source

## I. SACRED SCRIPTURE

### Theme 1: Pentateuch (con't)

- VIII.** The three large law codes of the Pentateuch
- A.** covenant code, law of holiness, Deuteronomic code
  - B.** location of these codes in the Pentateuch (books and chapters)
  - C.** main characteristics of each and essential differences among them
- IX.** The Decalogue
- A.** numbering in Jewish, Protestant, Catholic traditions; content of each in Catholic enumeration
  - B.** setting of Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy; differences between Exodus and Deuteronomy
  - C.** division into two groups of commandments (two tablets; 3 and 7; 5 and 5)
- X.** Traditional chronology of the Patriarchal Era, the stay in Egypt, and the Exodus
- A.** dates for Abraham, Moses, Exodus
  - B.** Is the Pentateuch a book of “history” in the modern sense of the word?
  - C.** evidence for the historicity of the Exodus; location of the *Yam Suph* (Red Sea) and Mount Sinai
  - D.** the Pentateuch and the history of Israel; when does the history of Israel begin?
- XI.** The Promises to the Patriarchs
- A.** land
  - B.** law
  - C.** progeny
  - D.** blessing

## I. SACRED SCRIPTURE

## Theme 2: The Prophets of Israel

### I. Definitions

- A. *nabi*; man of god; seer
- B. the Former Prophets; the Latter Prophets
- C. the Twelve Minor Prophets or the Book of the Twelve
- D. prophetic call story
- E. cult prophets; court prophets
- F. professional prophets
- G. Syro-Ehpraimite War 734-733
- H. fall of Israel 722
- I. invasion of Sennacherib 701
- J. fall of Judah and Jerusalem 587

### II. Non-Writing Prophecy

- A. Elijah cycle
- B. Elisha cycle

### III. Isaiah

- A. historical setting
- B. structure of the book
- C. theological themes
  - 1. call of the prophet
  - 2. Emmanuel prophecies
  - 3. servant songs

### IV. Jeremiah

- A. call
- B. confessions of Jeremiah
- C. Jeremiah and the New Testament
- D. historical context

### V. Ezekiel

- A. structure of the book
- B. Glory of God
- C. theological themes
  - 1. Son of Man
  - 2. the Good Shepherd

### VI. Amos and Hosea

- A. structure of the books
- B. historical contexts
- C. major theological themes

## I. SACRED SCRIPTURE

## Theme 3: Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles

- I. Genre of gospel
  - A. definition and Hellenistic usage of "euangelion"
  - B. literary genre of gospel
    1. Jewish influence
    2. Greco-Roman influence
  - C. development from oral to written forms
  - D. forms within the gospel such as parable, chreia, miracle story, etc.
  - E. apocryphal gospels, especially the Gospel of Thomas
  
- II. The Synoptic Problem
  - A. definition of "synoptic"
  - B. main issues involved
  - C. major hypotheses (Augustinian, Griesbach, Two-Source, Neo-Griesbach, Modified Two-Source, and Farrer-Goulder) and the strengths and weaknesses of each
  
- III. The Gospel of Mark
  - A. theories of authorship (patristic and modern), date, audience, main purpose
  - B. literary elements (language, style, structure, and any special features)
  - C. main themes, especially suffering, the cross
  - D. Christology
  - E. soteriology
  - F. discipleship
  
- IV. The Gospel of Matthew
  - A. theories of authorship (patristic and modern), date, audience, main purpose
  - B. literary elements (language, style, structure, and any special features)
  - C. main themes, especially the kingdom of heaven, the Law, the New Moses
  - D. Christology
  - E. soteriology
  - F. discipleship
  
- V. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles
  - A. theories of authorship (patristic and modern), date, audience, main purpose
  - B. literary elements (language, style, structure, and any special features)
  - C. main themes, especially salvation history, universality, daily Christian life
  - D. Christology
  - E. soteriology
  - F. discipleship
  - G. arguments for common authorship of Luke and Acts
  - H. literary and theological relationship of Luke and Acts
  - I. main elements of Acts 1-8, including the geographic structure, the main speeches, the roles of Peter and Paul, the composition of the early Church community

## II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

### Theme 1: Nature and Method of Theology

- I. Chief concepts, sources, figures, movements, and developments in the history of theology.
  - A. Patristic theology
  - B. Monastic theology
  - C. Scholasticism
  - D. Nominalism
  - E. Reformation (Protestant and Catholic)
  - F. The Enlightenment and Kant
  - G. 19th century
  - H. Modernism
  - I. 20th century
  
- II. The irreplaceable role of philosophy and the centrality of divine Revelation, as given through the modes of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, in the work of theology.
  - A. Critical exegesis
  - B. Theological exegesis
  - C. Content of Tradition
  - D. Form of Tradition
  - E. The question of Christian philosophy
  - F. Magisterial documents: *Dei Filius, Aeterni patris, Dei Verbum, Fides et ratio*
  
- III. St. Thomas Aquinas's understanding of what *sacra doctrina* is and the Common Doctor's special contribution to theology (cf. *Optatam Totius* 16 and *Code of Canon Law*, can. 252 §3).
  - A. The nature of *sacra doctrina*
  - B. Theology as a science
  - C. Theology as wisdom
  - D. Faith and theology
  - E. The place of Aquinas in theology today
  
- IV. The ecclesial vocation of theologians
  - A. Relationship to the Magisterium
    1. *Donum Veritatis*
    2. Doctrines regarding the Magisterium
    3. The role of the Magisterium in theology
  - B. The experience of the theologian
    1. Experience as a *locus* of theology
    2. *Sensus fidelium, sensus fidei*

## **II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY**

### **Theme 1: Nature and Method of Theology (con't)**

- V. Various forms of contemporary theology
  - A. Schools of contemporary theology
    - 1. Sources
    - 2. Leading figures
  - B. Assessment of contemporary schools
    - 1. In light of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
    - 2. In light of Thomistic theology

## II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Theme 2: The Doctrine of God

- I. The existence of God as a theological question (*ST I*, q. 1)
  - A. the possibility and nature of arguments for God's existence
    - 1. whether the proposition "God exists" is self-evident (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 1)
    - 2. how God's existence can and cannot be demonstrated (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 2)
    - 3. Aquinas' Five Ways of demonstrating that God exists (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 3)
      - a) the context and purpose of these proofs
      - b) infinite series
      - c) the difference between the fifth way and the intelligent design argument
  
- II. Basic biblical affirmations about God's nature
  - A. God as one
  - B. personal
  - C. transcendent in holiness and power
  - D. eternal
  - E. immutable
  
- III. The divine nature in systematic theology: fundamental affirmations
  - A. the nature of the cause of the world
  - B. essence and supposit in material and immaterial beings (*ST I*, q. 3, a. 3)
  - C. essence and existence in God and creatures (*ST I*, q. 3, a. 4)
  - D. God as the universal cause, who does not enter into composition with his effects (*ST I*, q. 3, a. 8)
  
- IV. The substantial attributes of God
  - A. their "negative" character
  - B. the attributes themselves
    - 1. simplicity (*ST I*, q. 3)
    - 2. perfection and goodness (*ST I*, qq. 4-6)
    - 3. infinity and omnipresence (*ST I*, qq. 7-8)
    - 4. immutability and eternity (*ST I*, qq. 9-10)
    - 5. unity (*ST I*, q. 11)
  - C. their bearing on the contemporary question of "immanence and transcendence"
  - D. their relation to the central biblical affirmations about God
  
- V. The operative attributes of God
  - A. the divine knowledge, truth, and life (*ST I*, qq. 14-18)
    - 1. God's knowledge of the future (*ST I*, q. 14, a. 13)
  - B. will and love in God (*ST I*, qq. 19-20)
    - 1. freedom (*ST I*, q. 19)
    - 2. necessity vs. contingency (*ST I*, q. 19, aa. 6, 8)
    - 3. evil (*ST I*, q. 19, aa. 6, 9)
    - 4. justice and mercy (*ST I*, q. 21)
    - 5. providence and predestination (*ST I*, qq. 22-23)
    - 6. power and happiness (*ST I*, qq. 25-26)



## II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

### Theme 2: The Doctrine of God (con't)

#### VI. The range and limits of human knowledge and discourse about God

- A. human knowledge of God (*ST I*, q. 12)
  - 1. glory and vision: no similitude but a created light
  - 2. grace and faith
  - 3. natural knowledge of God
- B. human speech about God (*ST I*, q. 13)
  - 1. analogy vs. metaphor
  - 2. negative, relational, and substantial naming

## II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Theme 3: The Doctrine of the Trinity

- I. The Trinity as the focus of Christian faith and life
  - A. biblical revelation
  - B. Trinitarian confession as rule of faith
  - C. invitation to Trinitarian communion
  
- II. Key moments in the history of the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity
  - A. economic Trinitarianism and the emergence of modalism
  - B. subordinationism: Origen and Arius
  - C. the Council of Nicea and the doctrine of "*homoousios* "
  - D. I Constantinople and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit
  - E. the "*filioque*" controversy: historical background and doctrinal issue
  
- III. Procession in the Trinity (*ST I*, q. 27)
  - A. the meaning and number of processions
  - B. the psychological analogy of the processions
    1. of the Word/Son: according to word and generation
    2. of the Spirit: according to love
  
- IV. Relations and Persons in the Trinity (*ST I*, qq. 28-29)
  - A. the real relations implied in the processions
  - B. the question of mutually opposed relations
  - C. the three divine persons
    1. the viability of theological use of the concept of "person" in the light of recent critiques
    2. subsistent relation and divine person
  
- V. The Blessed Trinity and our salvation
  - A. some aspects of the current debate on immanent/economic Trinity
  - B. the classical theory of "appropriation"
  - C. the Trinitarian missions (*ST I*, q. 43)
    1. processions and missions
    2. the mission of the Holy Spirit and the divine indwelling
  
- VI. Knowing and naming the Trinity (*ST I*, q. 13)
  - A. the proper names of the Trinity
  - B. evaluation of feminist proposals about "re-naming" the Trinity

## II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

### Theme 4: Christology

- I. The scope of Christian doctrines about Christ
  - A. Jesus Christ, the living Lord, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, died, rose and ascended into heaven
  - B. the divinity and humanity of the living Lord Jesus
  
- II. The biblical confession about Christ
  - A. textual, confessional and doctrinal starting points
  - B. the centrality of the resurrection
  - C. elements in the developing tradition: Pauline, Synoptic and Johannine contributions
  
- III. Authoritative formulation of Christology: key historical moments
  - A. early controversies: docetism, gnosticism, adoptionism
  - B. Nicaea and the disputes surrounding *homoousios*
  - C. Apollinarianism and the response of Athanasius
  - D. Monophysitism, Nestorianism and the responses of Ephesus and Chalcedon
  - E. post-Chalcedonian doctrinal formulations
  
- IV. The Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas
  - A. Christology and *sacra doctrina*: textual placement and doctrinal considerations
  - B. the justification of metaphysical discourse in Christology
  - C. refinements in the concepts of person, nature and Hypostatic Union (*ST III*, qq. 2-5)
  - D. the theological significance of the “co-assumed”
  - E. Christ’s perfections of grace, knowledge and power (*ST III*, qq. 7-9, 13)
  - F. Christ’s disabilities of body and soul (*ST III*, qq. 14-15)
  
- V. Contemporary reformulations of St. Thomas’s Christology
  - A. Christ’s consciousness and knowledge
  - B. Christ’s power and human limitations
  - C. Christ’s human personality
  
- VI. Christology and Modernity
  - A. critics of classical Christology: the Deists, Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Feuerbach
  - B. historical-critical methods and Catholic doctrine: tensions and resolutions
  - C. “history” and confession: significance and evaluation of the various quests for the historical Jesus
  - D. the role of a properly theological exegesis in Christology

## II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Theme 5: Soteriology (Theology of Redemption)

- I. Overview of soteriology
  - A. its relationships to other theological disciplines, philosophical questions and human experience
  - B. treatment in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- II. Soteriological themes and concepts in Scripture
  - A. promises, acts, institutions and interpretations of salvation in the Old Testament
  - B. relationship of Old Testament soteriology to Christ
    1. the Old Law and Christ's saving work
    2. appropriation of the Suffering Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah
  - C. soteriological motifs in the Old Testament and their applications in the New Testament: *go'el*, sacrifice, blood, expiation, ransom, redemption, messianism
  - D. salvific importance of Christ's Incarnation, life, passion, death, and resurrection
  - E. St. Paul's Christocentric soteriology: justification, reconciliation, salvation history
  - F. mediation, priesthood and sacrifice in *Hebrews*
  - G. other New Testament interpretations of soteriology
- III. Soteriological themes in the Patristic period
  - A. soteriological implications in the Christological controversies
  - B. Christ as exemplar and teacher
  - C. divinization
  - D. recapitulation, exchange, and the soteriological significance of the Incarnation
  - E. rights of the devil theory
- IV. St. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*
  - A. his critique of certain patristic theories
  - B. outline of the main argument
  - C. strengths and weaknesses of his soteriology
- V. The soteriology of St. Thomas Aquinas (*ST III*, qq. 48-49)
  - A. soteriological indications in the theology of creation
  - B. the placement of "soteriology" in the Christology of the *Summa Theologiae*
  - C. Christ's solidarity with humankind: the capital grace of Christ
  - D. the passion of Christ and its efficient causality
  - E. the soteriological import of Christ's resurrection
- VI. Accents in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation periods
- VII. Contemporary developments
  - A. Modern Solidarity Theories of Redemption
  - B. Modern Dereliction Theories of Atonement

## II. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Theme 6: The Church of God

- I. The history of ecclesiology
  - A. Patristic and medieval approaches, including that of St. Thomas Aquinas
  - B. Nineteenth-century developments (esp. J. A. Möhler, J. H. Newman, Vatican I)
  - C. The doctrine of the Church at Vatican II
  
- II. Fundamental scriptural affirmations of *Lumen gentium*
  - A. The Kingdom of God
  - B. The Body of Christ
  - C. The Bride of Christ
  - D. The Temple of the Holy Spirit
  - E. The People of God
  
- III. Dimensions of the Church
  - A. The Church as mystery and sacrament
  - B. Priesthood in the Church
    - 1. Ministerial priesthood
    - 2. Common priesthood (lay and religious forms)
  - C. The mission of the Church
  
- IV. The marks of the Church
  - A. One
    - 1. The Church and the Churches
      - a) "Subsistit in"
    - 2. Ecumenism
  - B. Holy
    - 1. The universal call to holiness
    - 2. The communion of the saints
    - 3. The eschatological calling of the Church
  - C. Catholic
    - 1. Membership
    - 2. Salvation outside the Church
  - D. Apostolic
    - 1. The twelve Apostles
    - 2. Apostolic succession
    - 3. Episcopacy
    - 4. The papacy
    - 5. The Magisterium: indefectibility and infallibility
  
- V. Mary and the Church
  - A. Mary, model mother of the Church
  - B. The new Eve
  - C. Mary as the eschatological symbol of the Church

### III. MORAL THEOLOGY

### Theme 1: The History of Moral Theology

- I. The failed search of the enlightenment for warrants for moral judgments
  - A. C.L. Stevenson and emotion
  - B. G.E. Moore: Goodness and Intuition
  - C. Kierkegaard: Radical Choice
  - D. Kant: Reason divorced from Passion
  - E. Hume: Passion as the Norm of Instrumental Reason.
  - F. the is-ought problem, and the rejection of metaphysics
  - G. the enlightenment and the rejection of revelation
  
- II. *Sacra Doctrina* linking transformation of mind to conversion of heart
  
- III. Scriptural themes in moral theology
  - A. covenant and law
  - B. the Commandments in their original and developed meanings
  - C. Jesus' apocalyptic preaching: the coming of the kingdom
  - D. The beatitudes: entry requirements or messianic proclamation?
  - E. St. Paul:
    - 1. justification by faith
    - 2. the new law and the old law
    - 3. the new creation and the renewal of the mind
  - F. St. John and *Agape*
  
- IV. The moral teaching of the Fathers of the Church
  - A. Suggested reading: Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, pp. 195-215.
  - B. general traits
  - C. as exemplified in Augustine
  
- V. The moral teaching of Aquinas
  - A. Suggested reading: Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, pp. 216-230
  - B. the occasion of the *Summa Theologiae*
  - C. the general outline of the *ST* I-II and the *ST* II-II.
  
- VI. The influence of William of Ockham
  - A. Suggested reading: Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, pp. 240-254.
  - B. nominalism and the loss of natural ends
  - C. voluntarism, and the unlimited power of God
  - D. the dimming of virtue and the ascendancy of obligation
  - E. freedom of indifference vs. freedom for excellence
  
- VII. The structure of the moral manuals: law, conscience and freedom
  
- VIII. The moral systems: probabilism, laxism, rigorism, probabiorism and equiprobabilism

### **III. MORAL THEOLOGY**

#### **Theme 1: The History of Moral Theology (con't)**

- IX.** The historical discussion of lying and usury. see Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*. pp 181-216.
  
- X.** Post Vatican II moral theology
  - A.** the biblical renewal
  - B.** the turn to autonomous ethics and proportionalism
  - C.** *Veritatis Splendor* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
  - D.** postmodern turns in contemporary catholic moral theology

### III. MORAL THEOLOGY

#### Theme 2: Basic Moral Principles

- I. Man as *imago Dei* (ST I-II, prologue)
- II. Where true happiness is and is not to be found (ST I-II, q. 2)
- III. The voluntary and its impediments: violence, fear, lust, ignorance (ST I-II, q. 6, a. 4-8)
- IV. The stages of human action: interior and exterior action (ST I-II, qq. 8-17)
- V. The fonts of morality: object, end and circumstances (ST I-II, qq. 18-20)
- VI. The controversy over proportionalism (Christopher Kaczor, *Proportionalism and the Natural Law Tradition*, 23-44; 119-140)
  - A. the possibility and significance of exceptionless moral norms
  - B. the revision of the principle of double effect
  - C. physical evil and moral evil
  - D. proportionate reason
  - E. critique of proportionalism
- VII. The Thomistic notion of *habitus* and virtue (ST I-II, q. 49-67)
  - A. *habitus* as quality.
  - B. *habitus*, potency, act, and conversion
  - C. *habitus*, virtue and freedom
  - D. the cause of the virtues: human nature, human action and God
  - E. the seat of the virtues: intellect, will, passions
  - F. the mean, equality and connection of the virtues
- VIII. Sin and vice
  - A. original sin
  - B. venial sin
  - C. mortal sin
- IX. Law (ST I-II, q. 93-94)
  - A. eternal law and providence
  - B. the precepts of the natural law and human appetite
  - C. the mutability of the natural law
- X. The New Law of Grace (ST I-II, q. 106)
  - A. its definition
  - B. its function as capstone to Aquinas's moral theology
- XI. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit (ST I-II, q. 68)