



## Master of Arts in Theology (MAT) Written Comprehensive Examination Questions

### I. SACRED SCRIPTURE

#### Ia. Introduction to the Study of Sacred Scripture

1. In a survey and evaluation of methods and approaches employed in reading the Scriptures, the Pontifical Biblical Commission both affirmed and qualified use of historical-critical interpretation (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 1993). Explore the various dimensions of this issue, noting and commenting on the principle concerns of this instruction.
2. The historical formation of the Christian biblical canon involved a complex and prolonged process of inheritance, collection and discernment. Expand upon this statement, clarifying key elements and developments in the determination of what became “Sacred Scripture”
3. *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* (“On the Historical Truth of the Gospels,” 1964) provided the Church with important principles and analysis of the process by which the traditions of Jesus’ word and work came to be included in the canonical gospels. Examine the background and explain the main conclusions of this instructional document.
4. How does the doctrine of biblical inspiration accommodate the findings of historical-critical research that the canonical books might have been the product of lengthy development, multiple traditions and sources, as well as successive writers and editors?

#### Ib. Pentateuch

1. Discuss the respective theological approaches of the J-E and P sources to the Primeval "History" of Genesis 1-11.
2. Discuss the theological themes of the Patriarchal Narratives as well as the theological importance of these Narratives within the genealogical structure of the Book of Genesis.
3. Explain the theological significance of the events surrounding the Exodus in the Book of Exodus 1-18.
4. Discuss the importance of the Exodus event as a theological motif in the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole.

5. Discuss the various theological aspects of the Pentateuchal sources' understanding of "Covenant."
6. Examine the important theological themes of the Book of Deuteronomy.

### **Ic. Prophetic Literature**

1. Explore the rise of prophecy in the history of Israel as well as the nature and role of the prophet before God and people.
2. Discuss the basic forms of prophetic speech/action used by the prophets.
3. Explain the extent to which the centrality of "Covenant" influences the message of the Old Testament prophets.
4. Discuss the theme of justice and peace in the prophetic literature.
5. Examine the various ideas, images and themes associated with the prophets' eschatological vision of the restoration of Israel after the Exile.

### **Id. Wisdom Literature**

1. Discuss the nature of Wisdom in the Old Testament and the extent to which one can relate the Old Testament wisdom traditions to the Old Testament Pentateuchal-historical-prophetic traditions.
2. Explore the theological theme of suffering and retribution in the wisdom literature.

### **Ie. Psalms**

1. Discuss what methodological considerations are involved in a form-critical and rhetorical approach to the Psalms. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
2. Discuss how the main genres of the Psalms exemplify the Psalmists' understanding of God.
3. Discuss how the various Pentateuchal and Davidic traditions are used in the Psalms.

### **If. Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke-Acts**

1. Discuss the three "stages" in the development of the Gospels, paying particular attention to the principal operative factors shaping the material at each stage of the tradition.
2. Discuss the principal theological theme(s) of either the Gospels of Mark or Matthew from the point of view of an understanding of the literary structure of that Gospel.
3. Discuss the meaning of Jesus' death in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.
4. Compare and contrast the principal theological themes of the Matthean and Lukan Infancy Narratives.

5. Discuss Matthew's attempt to remodel his community's self-understanding by means of his Gospel.
6. Discuss Matthew's view of Law and Gospel, especially as that is unfolded in the Sermon on the Mount.
7. Discuss the various ways in which the Passion of Jesus and discipleship are developed as interlocking themes in the Gospel of Mark.
8. In what ways is Luke 4:16-30 programmatic for understanding all of Luke-Acts?
9. Discuss the interrelated themes of the Holy Spirit and prayer in Luke-Acts.
10. Discuss how Luke's presentation of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem and Paul's witness in Rome fits into the larger theological theme of the "plan" of God developed in Luke-Acts.
11. Discuss the theme of universalism (concern for the poor, rejected, women, Samaritans, etc.) in Luke-Acts.
12. Discuss the theme of political apologetic within the context of the purpose of Luke-Acts.

### **Ig. Pauline Literature**

1. Discuss how Paul's theology is fundamentally apocalyptic.
2. Discuss the meaning of "gospel" in Paul's theology.
3. Discuss the multi-faceted theme of Christian freedom in the Pauline letters.
4. Discuss Paul's theology of the Eucharist.
5. Selecting one of the concrete pastoral problems Paul addresses in any one of his letters, discuss the underlying views of Paul's "opponents" and how Paul reflects theologically to arrive at a response to it.
6. Discuss Paul's approach, especially in Romans and Philippians, regarding how Christians ought to relate to civil authorities/government.

### **Ih. Johannine Literature**

1. Explain the influences of and treatment of the so-called "Signs-" traditionally found within the Fourth Gospel.
2. Discuss, on the basis of evidence contained within the Johannine Gospel and epistolary literature, the social and theological factors, which contributed to the growth and development of the Johannine tradition.
3. Discuss the relationship of Johannine soteriology to Johannine Christology.
4. Discuss several ways in which the Gospel of John presents the majesty and sovereignty of Jesus.

5. Examine the distinctive Johannine theology of the death of Jesus with reference to one other New Testament work (Gospel, Epistle).
6. Discuss the figure of "the Disciple whom Jesus loved" with reference to the growth of the Johannine tradition AND with reference to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

## II. DOGMATIC/SACRAMENTAL/LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

### Questions 1-7

1. Discuss the Christian view of the person as openness to God. How is this teaching fundamental to a theology of revelation?
2. Compare and contrast the First and the Second Vatican Councils in regard to their positions on revelation and faith. Be attentive to historical setting and theological method.
3. Present a theology of faith that integrates pertinent biblical, doctrinal, and anthropological data.
4. Discuss the Catholic position on tradition and relate it to the issue of the development of doctrine.
5. Analyze the historical doctrinal process that led to the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.). Assess the theological adequacy of its dogmatic formulation about Jesus.
6. Discuss the resurrection of Jesus from the viewpoint of its:
  - a. biblical foundation
  - b. soteriological implications, and
  - c. paradigmatic function for the resurrection of the believer.
7. Construct a theology of redemption/salvation that integrates pertinent biblical, patristic, medieval, modern, and contemporary data.

### Questions 8-15

8. Discuss the Hebrew notion of the name YHWH and elaborate significant characteristics of the Hebrew notion of God. How is this notion both preserved and developed within the New Testament traditions?
9. Trace the main lines of the development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity from the New Testament scriptures up to, and including, the First Council of Constantinople (381 C.E.). In what places and how does the Second Vatican Council make use of the doctrine of the Trinity?
10. Discuss the doctrine of creation, in terms of its foundations in scripture and the history of dogma. Relate this doctrine to one or another major truth of faith.
11. What are the main lines of an adequate theological appreciation of the mystery of sin?
12. Consider the principal biblical, historical and doctrinal insights that ought to inform a theology of grace. What teachings about the person are crucial to this discussion? How is authentic freedom possible in relation to grace?

13. What are the major aspects of the process of justification? What is the present ecumenical state of the question relative to the Lutheran tradition? How does Catholic theology today speak about good works and merit?
14. With the use of the concepts "communion," "sacrament," "body of Christ," and "people of God," construct the key perspectives of a theology of Church. Examine the theological meaning of clergy and laity, particularly in light of these concepts.
15. Discuss the teaching authority of the Church in relation to Scripture, tradition, the supernatural sense of faith possessed by all believers, the role of theologians, and the possibility of dissent.

### **Questions 16-21**

16. Assess the ecclesiology-based theology of ecumenism taught by the Second Vatican Council. How is ecumenical involvement an imperative for the entire Catholic Church?
17. What are the main lines of present-day Roman Catholic appreciation of Mary and of devotion to her?
18. Present the central teachings of the Church in reference to eschatology. What is meant by the eschatological nature of the Church?
19. Distinguish sign from symbol from metaphor. How does the Christian sacrament relate to the mystery of salvation? What does the Catholic Church teach about the efficacy of sacramental acts?
20. Discuss the liturgical principles set out in Vatican II's Sacrosanctum Concilium insofar as they have promoted authentic renewal through worship. How do they address themes of liturgical renewal present at the time of the Council of Trent?
21. Explain the ways in which the language and rhythm of the liturgical year serve to articulate the different dimensions of the Paschal Mystery.

### **Questions 22-29**

22. Baptism is the way Eucharist begins; Eucharist is how Baptism is sustained in the life of Christians. Explain this statement in light of pertinent biblical and doctrinal sources and in reference to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.
23. Analyze the relationship of the Christian Eucharist to Jewish worship at the time of Jesus. What major changes have taken place in the theology and the practice of the Eucharist? How does contemporary sacramental theology explain the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist as it comprises a memorial and a sacrifice?
24. Discuss the biblical, historical, and theological background of the present Roman Catholic teaching on infant Baptism. In what sense is one to understand the assertion that infant Baptism is the exception, rather than the norm, in regard to sacramental initiation?
25. Discuss the Second Vatican Council's doctrine of the participation in the unique High Priesthood of Christ on the part of the baptized and of the ordained. Show also how the Council understands the

trilogy of priest, prophet, and king to be the paradigm for the functions of Christ and of all the members of the people of God. What is the basis in Vatican II for the assertion that all ministry is missionary?

26. Explain the present Roman Catholic teaching on the three-fold ordained ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Include significant elements of its historical development.
27. What is the historical and theological process that led to the doctrine of marriage as a sacrament? How has Vatican II added to that development?
28. Discuss the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the light of pertinent biblical, historical, and doctrinal data. Evaluate the contemporary shift in pastoral practice with regard to this sacrament.
29. Examine the historical and theological reasons for the Vatican II revision of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

### **III. MORAL - SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY**

#### **IIIa. Fundamental Moral Theology**

1. Some observers have noted that the most conspicuous feature of moral theology since Vatican II is its shift from using the language of “human nature” to that of “human person.” Discuss the significance of this change, explaining how this personalist foundation for morality is regarded to have been set forth by the Second Vatican Council and what is meant by the “human person integrally and adequately considered.”
2. Conscience has been described as “the most secret core and sanctuary of the human person” (*Gaudium et spes* no. 16). Examine the current understanding of conscience in Roman Catholic theological thought. In this investigation, consider the principal Roman Catholic sources available to assist a person in the formation of conscience, and explain why Catholic theological tradition holds that a person must follow the dictates of conscience.
3. The topic of sin has long been a major concern of moral theology. Discuss the various concepts of sin that are developed in the Scriptures, as well as some of the significant distinctions that have been made in Catholic theological tradition concerning our understanding of its reality. Be sure to include an appropriate approach to understanding sin today.
4. The Second Vatican Council mandated that moral theology is to be “more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching” (*Optatam totius* no. 16). Explain how the Scriptures had been used in moral theology previous to Vatican II and what is considered to be an appropriate use of the Scriptures in moral theology today. In the reflection, consider central biblical themes and key concepts that are significant in the development of moral theology.
5. The concept of Natural Law has been an important component of Catholic moral theology. Discuss the various theories of Natural Law that have been prevalent throughout history, and examine the significant aspects of the contemporary discussion within Roman Catholic moral theology concerning Natural Law.

### IIIb. Contemporary Problems in Moral Theology

1. The Congregation for Catholic Education stated in 1989: “Its (i.e. Catholic Social Doctrine’s) foundation and primary object are the dignity of the human person with its inalienable rights.” Discuss the theological and scriptural basis for the dignity of the human person and how that dignity is applied to questions such as abortion, euthanasia, experimentation on humans, and human work.
2. In “The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response,” the United States Bishops observe that the just war and pacifist positions “support and complement one another, each preserving the other from distortion” (#121). Discuss this statement, giving the argument of both the just war theory and the pacifist position, making sure to include appreciation and criticism of each.
3. Many have argued that a “consistent ethic of life” calls for the abolition of capital punishment within the United States. Examine the traditional reasons for support of capital punishment in general, and evaluate its suitability in the United States today. Be sure to include modern Roman Catholic magisterial teachings in your response.
4. Issues of euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, medically-assisted nutrition and hydration, and other related areas are of growing concern in today’s world. Examine the proper care of the dying patient, using relevant principles and giving proper consideration to what treatment may be mandatory and what may be forgone. Special attention should be given to issues surrounding medically-assisted nutrition and hydration. Is there a difference in the moral evaluation of withholding treatment and making a positive intervention to end life?
5. “Every perspective on economic life that is human, moral, and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do *for* people? What does it do *to* people? And how do people *participate* in it?” (“Economic Justice for All,” Chapter 1, #1). Explain the principles of Catholic social teaching which you see exemplified by these three questions of the economic pastoral letter. Be sure to include some discussion of other magisterial teachings (encyclicals, etc.) which have been influential in setting forth these principles.

### IIIc. Human Sexuality and Marriage

1. St. Augustine’s thoughts on sexuality and marriage have been greatly influential in the understanding of such matters in western Christianity. Discuss Augustine’s understanding of human sexuality and his theology of marriage, and examine their influence in modern Roman Catholic teaching on human sexuality and marriage.
2. In light of the Roman Catholic Church’s teachings on human sexuality and marriage, examine the morality of *artificial insemination* and *in vitro fertilization*. In the discussion, be sure to employ current magisterial teaching and accurate scientific information, making proper distinctions in the various procedures used, while also applying the appropriate moral and theological principles.
3. Discuss the treatment of the ends of marriage given by Twentieth Century Roman Catholic magisterial teaching from the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* to John Paul II’s *Familiaris consortio*. In your answer, indicate both consistencies and developments. What significance does this treatment hold for Roman Catholic teaching on human sexuality and marriage today?
4. Review and evaluate the current teaching of the Roman Catholic Church’s Magisterium in regard to homosexual persons and acts, both in regard to its theological principles and pastoral applications. In

your evaluation, consider current scientific theories concerning homosexuality and its origins. Distinguish between the affective and genital dimensions of sexuality, and weigh the importance of both for living a fully healthy and happy life.

5. “Responsible parenthood” is a concept often employed in the discussion of the morality of contraception. Examine the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church’s Magisterium on contraception since Vatican II, giving consideration to the arguments used. How does this teaching harmonize with the notion of “responsible parenthood?”

### **III. Spiritual Theology**

1. In practice, spirituality finds its starting point in experience rather than in abstract ideas. Historically, all great movements in the Church of “schools of spirituality” arose in response to specific needs and circumstances and have roots in particular cultures and eras whose perspectives they initially reflected. Comment on these various “schools of spirituality,” their impact on Christianity, and how Vatican II has assisted in the interpretation of contemporary spirituality.
2. “The Monastic Church is the Church of the wilderness, the woman who has fled into the desert from the dragon that seeks to devour the infant Word. She is the Church who, by her silence, nourishes and protects the seed of the gospel that is sown by the Apostles in the hearts of the faithful. She is the Church who, by her prayer, gains strength for the Apostles themselves, so often harassed by the monster. The Monastic Church is the one who flees to a special place prepared for her by God in the wilderness, and hides her face in the Mystery of the divine silence, and prays while the great battle is being fought between heaven and earth. Her flight is not an invasion. If the monk were able to understand what goes on inside him, he would be able to say how well he knows that the battle is being fought in his own heart.” The Silent Life - Thomas Merton. How do you understand the nature and place of the monastic life within the call of the whole church to corporate discipleship?
3. Current theological literature devotes significant attention to explication of the phenomenon of conversion. As we approach the Twenty-First century and pursue our journeys continually to “return” to our God, one should draw upon one’s sacred roots for the strength and nourishment that will encourage one in an ongoing process of conversion. What is your understanding of conversion and how is this experience central to the biblical and spiritual traditions of both Judaism and Christianity? How did the lives of Francis of Assisi and Ignatius of Loyola attest to the dynamics of conversion, and what social and cultural implications can be made for us today?

## **IV. HISTORICAL STUDIES**

1. Describe at least three heresies that are being addressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and how these were refuted by the early Church.
2. Describe the origins of the Petrine Primacy in the early Church and its continued development in the Middle Ages.
3. Describe the theological views of the Antiochene and Alexandrian schools and how these contributed to the Christological Controversy.

4. Describe the origin of monasticism in the early Church and its development in the Middle Ages, as well as its contributions to Christianity and European society.
5. Describe the various phases of the Anglican Reformation, from the Henrician Reformation to the Elizabethan Settlement.
6. Compare and contrast the Catholic Reformation and Counter-Reformation. What were the successes and limitations of these two phases and how did they relate to one another?
7. Beginning with the French Revolution, describe the relationship of Roman Catholicism with the modern world.
8. Describe papal diplomacy from Pius IX and the loss of the Papal States to the John Paul II and the end of the Cold War.
9. Describe the relationship of Catholics in the United States with their fellow American citizens and the wider Catholic community. How did Catholics in the United States respond to this perceived tension between being loyal Americans and faithful Catholics?