Topics for the MA Comprehensive Exam
Revised, July 2015

Biblical Studies

Topic: Psalms and Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament
The Psalms and Wisdom books of the Old Testament present a collection of distinctive voices in the scriptural canon, to be distinguished from the narrative and prophetic writings. These voices had their historical beginnings in the context of ancient Israel and Second Temple period Judaism. As sacred Scripture, they have continued to speak to Jews and Christians over following centuries, up to today. For this question you should be able to discuss the following: 1.) The basic compositional and literary features of the Psalms and Wisdom Literature; 2.) the major themes or motifs of each book.

Bibliography:
Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Sirach (i.e. Ben Sirah), Wisdom of Solomon


Article:

Topic: Election in Old Testament Theology
An important and prominent theme of Old Testament Theology concerns the election of Israel as God’s people. This topic will explore the meaning and significance of election in the Old Testament and how that understanding is shaped through experiences of exile and suffering.

Bibliography:

Genesis, Job


**Article**


**Topic: New Testament: Jesus in the Gospels**

The operative image of Jesus Christ used by many Christian communities today is a combination of the different images of Jesus from the four canonical gospels in the New Testament. Each gospel writer highlights different aspects of the person of Jesus Christ. For example, Jesus appears as the mysterious and powerful miracle worker in Mark’s Gospel and in Matthew’s text, the reader comes to know Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. In order to better understand and know Jesus and what it looks like to follow him, it is important to consider how the different authors of the gospel texts characterized Jesus for their readers and their communities. In this question, explore how the authors of the gospel texts image Jesus and correspondingly discuss their understanding of what it means to be his disciple. The authors’ primary views of Jesus and discipleship, though different, are not uncomplementary. Thus, be sure to discuss how these views inform one another. Who was Jesus for the gospel writers? What does it mean to be his disciple?

**Bibliography**

**Books**


**Articles/Article-length Items:**


**Topic: New Testament: Pauline Writing**

The Pauline letters were foundational in the growth of the early church and influenced the development of orthodox Christian belief and practice. The theological ideas central to Paul’s thought include: being in Christ, justification by faith apart from the law, a partially realized eschatology, and in his letters, Paul espouses an indicative/imperative ethical method. In your answer, discuss these ideas as they appear in the authentic Pauline Letters. Then, discuss how these ideas reappear, shift, and change in the deuto-Pauline texts and in the Pastoral Epistles. Discuss how socio-political situations caused the later interpreters of Paul to shift his ideas and what thoughts/practices they were likely combatting when writing their letters. In your response, it will not be necessary to include all the Pauline Letters and Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament, but make sure that your answer is thorough and includes examples from different texts. What did Paul teach? How were these teachings interpreted in the second century?

**Bibliography**


**Articles**


**Topic: Biblical Interpretation**

The field of biblical exegesis is populated by various and often competing methods of interpretation. From a consideration of the following sources, be prepared to discuss [1] the basic features of various exegetical methods (Barton; Pontifical Biblical Commission); [2] their development with the Christian tradition (Farkasfalvy [2010]; Reventlow); and [3] the benefits and limitations of current approaches for the life of the Church (*Dei Verbum*; Farkasfalvy [1986 & 2010]; de la Potterie; Ratzinger).

**Bibliography:**


*Dei Verbum.* (The dogmatic constitution on divine revelation of the Second Vatican Council, promulgated by Pope Paul VI, November 18, 1965.)


**Articles:**


### Catechetical Studies

**Topic: The Apologetics of Love (forthcoming)**

**Topic: Use of Scripture in the Catechism of the Catholic Church**

The Catechism cites Scriptural texts with profusion. How can we characterize the use to which this rich Scriptural apparatus is put? What is the model for this Scriptural catechesis of the Word of God? The frequency of patristic citations in the text of the Catechism should be a clue here, for the Catechism’s use of Scripture reminds us of usage of scripture in patristic exegesis. This topic will explore what is meant by the term, “scriptural catechesis”? What makes “Scriptural catechesis” so appealing? What may be some of its drawbacks? How does the Catechism use scripture in similar ways to some writers of the early traditions of Christian exegesis? What examples from the Catechism and from the early Christian writers are illustrative? What role(s) does historical-critical biblical scholarship have in “scriptural catechesis”?

**Bibliography**


*Dei Verbum*. (The dogmatic constitution on divine revelation of the Second Vatican Council, promulgated by Pope Paul VI, November 18, 1965.)


Augustine. *Instructing Beginners in Faith [De catechizandis rudibus]*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006. (Note especially chapters 3-6, and Augustine’s “sample” catechesis, chapters 16-25.)


*Article*

**Topic: Integration of Theological Studies and Ministerial Practice**

The *National Directory for Catechesis* (USCCB, 2005) states the following in Article #29: “Effective catechesis should feature no opposition or artificial separation between content and method. Similar to the dynamic present in the pedagogy of God, catechetical methodology serves to transmit both the content of the entire Christian message and the source of that message, the Triune God. Catechetical methodology must be able to communicate that message, together with its sources and language, to particular ecclesial communities, while always bearing in mind the particular circumstances of those to whom the message is addressed. Content and method interact and harmonize in the communication of the faith.” In this topic, students explore catechetical methodologies by examining the process of theological reflection involved in the integration of theological studies and ministerial praxis. Students also demonstrate knowledge of effective pastoral/ministerial skills and pedagogies for catechetical leadership, particularly those involved in adult faith formation.

**Bibliography**


**Articles**


Topic: The Nature of Catechesis

“Catechesis is an essentially ecclesial act—one action of the Church . . .” (NDC 19C quoting GDC 78). The publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, along with developing understandings of catechesis, led to the General Directory for Catechesis in 1997, which replaced the 1971 General Catechetical Directory that had resulted from the Second Vatican Council. Similarly, the 2005 National Directory for Catechesis replaced the 1979 national directory. Both the GDC and NDC situate catechesis firmly within the context of evangelization and rely on dimensions of the baptismal catechumenate as fundamental to the catechetical enterprise. Informed by your knowledge of the NDC, GDC, and other readings, as well as knowledge gained in your coursework on the history of and approaches to catechesis, explore the following issues: the aims of catechesis and how it accomplishes such aims; the six tasks of catechesis and their essential and interrelated nature; the meaning of “the pedagogy of the faith” (NDC 28ff.; GDC Part Three); the relationship between catechesis and evangelization; and the contribution of the baptismal catechumenate to an understanding of the nature of catechesis.

Bibliography


Articles


Mulhall, Daniel S. “A Brief Walk through the National Directory for Catechesis.”
Topic: Christology

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in #465 “The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man.” This topic explores the Church’s teaching about the personal identity of Jesus Christ, which the Council of Chalcedon officially formulated in its “symbol” (decree). Students will be able to draw from the history of doctrine in their explorations of this topic.

Bibliography


Article:

History of Christianity

Topic: The Early Church

How could you use patristic sources to help reflect on the proper relation between faith and reason in Christian theology? Two somewhat opposite positions, for example, can be found in Tertullian on the one hand, and in Clement of Alexandria, on the other. Justin Martyr proposes what one might think of as a middle position, developed further in the East by such figures as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, and in the West by Augustine. Pick four of these figures, including Clement and Tertullian, to help explain the thinking of the early Church on the relation between faith and reason.

Bibliography
Augustine, *The Confessions*, translated by Maria Boulding, OSB.
Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*.
Justin Martyr, *First Apology*.
Tertullian, *On Idolatry*.

**Articles**


**Topic: Mary**

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, citing Paul VI, “The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship” (#971). This topic explores the Church’s teaching about Mary in order to explain this statement. How is it that devotion to Mary does not compete with Christian worship of God but is, to the contrary, “intrinsic” to it? What, for example, is the relation between Mary and the Church? How is this related to her relationship to Christ? The topic features sections from the Catechism and related theological reflection.

**Bibliography**

**Books**

[See especially §§487-511, 721-726, 963-975.]


Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*.

*Lumen Gentium*. [See especially §§52-69, (Chapter 8)]


**Article**

Topic: Patristic Exegesis: Augustine and Origen

On the whole, this topic acquaints us with two foundational figures, Augustine and Origen, whose styles of exegesis were formative of the spiritual and theological tradition of the Church. In particular, this topic provides an opportunity to show familiarity with the exegetics styles of these two church fathers by reading: Origen’s On First Principles and Augustine’s De Doctrina Christiana. Each offers a method of interpretation. In De Doctrina Christiana (396-426), Augustine presents a method for interpreting Scripture and for communicating it to others. This method is rooted in the conviction that charity is the ultimate “thing” (res) to which Scripture refers. Moreover, in Books 1 and 2 we see that Augustine’s method is Christocentric, reflecting his understanding of Scripture as a revelation which parallels the Incarnation. Likewise, Origen’s On First Principles presents a method of interpretation that incorporates a Christological understanding of/structure to the biblical text. Why do Origen and Augustine incorporate the identity of Christ in outlining the fundamentals of scriptural exegesis? How do they do so? In what ways do they incorporate Christology differently, and why might this be? Ultimately, how does each view the task of scriptural interpretation in the spiritual life?

Bibliography
Origen, On First Principles, Book IV. Translated by G.W. Butterworth

Topic 5: Medieval Theology

Medieval theology was "radically theocentric, Trinitarian, Scriptural and sacramental," and it "operated with a profound understanding” that was “intellectual” rather than solely "rational" (to
The fall of ancient Rome, the flourishing of new monastic orders, the rise of the universities, the preaching of the mendicants, the influence of mystics and visionaries, the trauma experienced through ecclesiastical schism and heresy, the growth of the liturgy—all these, each in its own way, prompted theological questions not only concerning Christ and his Church, but also about theology itself: its nature, its scope and divisions, its sources and guarantees, its place among the arts and sciences. This topic provides an opportunity to identify the main kinds of medieval theological (scholastic/monastic/spiritual) work and their principal settings and genres by examining some of the more renowned scholastic, monastic, and, lay spiritual theologians. Thus, for this topic you will please prepare a careful and considered comparison of scholastic, monastic, and spiritual theological work by comparing St. Bernard of Clairvaux (monastic), St. Thomas Aquinas (scholastic) and St. Bonaventure (spiritual) on the Love of God as shown in the Life of Christ, and our love of God as show in our imitation of Christ.

Bibliography


Topic: A History of Theology & Spirituality

Why is the modern distinction between theology and "spirituality" both misleading and unhelpful, when viewed from the perspective of the first Christian centuries? How was a critical and prayerful reflection on the received faith of the Church understood not so much as a kind of academic discipline (as in the modern university) and more as an integral element in personal configuration to Christ and the spiritual progress or discipline of the believer in the Church?

Bibliography


Justin, *1 Apology*

Origen, “Prologue to the *Commentary on the Canticle*” in *Select Writings*, ed. by R. Greer.

Athenasius, *Life of Anthony*

Gregory of Nazianzus, *First Theological Oration*

Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*: Preface and Book 1
Topic: Medieval Eucharist (will retire in Summer 2016)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls the Eucharist “the source and summit of the Christian life” (1324), also proclaiming it the “sacrament of love,” a “bond of charity” (1323). In insisting on the centrality and great importance of this sacrament, and affirming love in connection with the Eucharist, the Catechism is drawing on both scripture, and, early and medieval tradition. For this topic, study the CCC on the Eucharist and consider its teaching in relation to scripture and to select early and medieval authors: Ambrose; Augustine; Aquinas. Why does the CCC insist on the Eucharist as the source and summit, and highlight Eucharist charity? What beliefs about Christ, the Church, and human beings, are involved in this portrayal of the Eucharist? What in scripture authorizes this teaching? What in Ambrose, in Augustine, in Aquinas, is echoed in the CCC? Are there aspects of the scriptural and post-scriptural tradition’s account of the Eucharist as source and summit that have been omitted or downplayed in the CCC?

Bibliography


Aquinas, Summa theological III, qq. 73-83. Translated by the English Dominicans. Available at: [www.newadvent.org/](http://www.newadvent.org/).

*Articles*


The earliest expression of the fullness of participation in the Paschal Mystery is martyrdom, in which configuration to Christ dead and risen initiated in baptism and deepened by the Eucharist is experienced physically by the martyr. With the end of the phenomenon of persecution, what
might be called the "spirituality" of martyrdom was embodied by the ascetics. Be able to explain how the sacramental life mediates meaning and formats existence both for the martyr and the ascetical Christian.

Bibliography


Athanasius, Life of Anthony

Article-length Item

Liturgical Studies

Topic: Christian Initiation.

This topic invites you to trace the historical development of the liturgies and theological interpretations of Christian Initiation in the West from the New Testament period to the modern period of ecumenical convergence. More particular questions to shape your preparation include: What is the catechumenate and how did/does the process of Christian initiation prepare candidates for their Christian life? What is the purpose of the anointing at Initiation that became the Sacrament of Confirmation? What led to the separating of Confirmation from Baptism? Why did confirmation develop into a rite separate from baptism in the West but not in the East? How does a consideration of the diverse images of Baptism within the Christian tradition(s) assist us toward gaining a better appreciation for infant baptism in the life of the Church? Imagine you are on a diocesan or larger commission charged with further reform of the Sacrament of Confirmation. How would you approach this topic liturgically, historically, and canonically? How would you address the question of first communion in this context?

Bibliography:


**Topic: The Eucharist.**

The Eucharist is “source and summit” of the Christian faith and life. How is the Eucharist both “source” and “summit”? What can we learn from the history of the Eucharist to deepen our appreciation of the Eucharist? More particularly, how has this history shaped the structure and content of the Eucharist liturgy such that we come to better understand this mystery of faith as we celebrate it?

**Bibliography (Eucharist, cont’d)**


**Topic: Liturgical Year.**

The Church measures time and lives not by the civic calendar but according to its own cycle of feasts and seasons. This question explores the history and theology of the central feasts and seasons of what is called the liturgical or Church year: the original Christian feast of Sunday (e.g. In what ways is Sunday the original Feast Day?); Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany; Lent, Easter, and Pentecost (e.g. How are Lent, the Triduum, and Easter related yet distinctive “seasons” of the liturgical year? What are their historical origins? What are their theological emphases?). What do we celebrate on such occasions and how might we celebrate these feasts and seasons "fully," "consciously," and "actively?" What is the importance of observing the liturgical year to Christian life and formation (e.g. Propose some pastoral strategies that might distinguish these seasons more clearly in the thought and liturgical life of the assembly.)?

**Bibliography:**

Topic: Liturgical Theology

“The Church was made manifest to the world on the day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the ‘dispensation of the mystery’—the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of his Church, ‘until he comes.’” (CCC, §1076). This topic will explore how the liturgy is the “work of the holy Trinity,” and, given that presupposition, how we are to think about the Church’s role in Eucharist, sacrifice, thanksgiving, and proclamation. Such an exploration will most likely involve notions of “mystery”, “sacrament” and “baptismal identity”.

Bibliography


Article


Topic: Sacraments

Lumen Gentium says that in the Church, “the life of Christ is poured into the believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified.” This question looks at the theological dimensions of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church as the means whereby Christians are mystically united to the life of Christ. With this topic you will explore the categories used by the tradition to express sacramental theology.
Bibliography
*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Sections: 1210-1321; 1420-1666.

**Topic: Ritual Studies**

Understanding the rites of the Christian churches as human rituals has impacted both the reforms of liturgical practice and the interpretation of these rites over the past 50 years. The use of the human sciences, especially anthropology, has helped liturgists classify rites according to their human dimension. This topic will explore how ritual theory and classification can be used to describe the symbolic, embodied, and transformative aspects of rituals of the Christian communities.

**Bibliography**


**Articles**

**Systematics**

**Topic: Doctrine of Salvation**

What is the Church’s teaching on salvation? There has been a long battle between the belief that salvation only comes through Christ and that salvation can be found in other religions. As in the past, this question is of importance in our day and age, especially as we live in a highly secular world. How do Catholic theologians, particularly Karl Rahner, approach this question?
Think in terms of Rahner’s argument of the anonymous Christian. Is it possible to reconcile the two positions mentioned previously (salvation through Christ/salvation possible through other religions)? Also, in your response be sure to include how other theologians received Rahner’s proposition. What were their arguments for/against his position?

Bibliography:


Articles:


Topic: Eucharistic Ecclesiology

“The Church is the celebration of the Eucharist; the Eucharist is the Church; they do not simply stand side by side; they are one and the same; it is from there that everything else radiates.” This statement of Josef Ratzinger is the fruit of decades of prolific theological reflection and scholarship on the relationship between the Church and the Eucharist in the twentieth century. This topic will examine some of the insights of a so-called “Eucharistic Ecclesiology.” It is not intended as a comprehensive treatment of its pioneers (Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas, for example), but instead seeks to highlight some implications of this self-understanding for Eucharistic communities and individual believers. Put another way, if both the Church and the Eucharist are “The Body of Christ,” what are some ways that this image animates the communal and personal prayer and practice of Christians?

Bibliography

Books

John Paul II. Encyclical *On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church (Ecclesia de Eucharistia)* 17 April 2003.


**Articles**


**Topic: Vatican II and the Church (Ecclesiology)**

The Second Vatican Council was convened in 1962. The council proved to be a turning point in Catholic thinking as the Church experienced a period of critical development in self-understanding. This question allows you to explore some of the developments that occurred during and as a result of the second Vatican Council. Why was the Second Vatican Council called? What was Pope John XXIII’s vision for this event? How was the Church’s nature and mission redefined or renewed at the council? How do the documents listed in the bibliography connect to John XXIII’s vision for Vatican II? Specifically, how is *Lumen gentium* at the center of the council’s aims? Describe how ideas that were initially developed in *Lumen gentium* (1964) get further worked out in *Gaudium et spes* (1965) and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964). How do these two documents advance the overall vision of Vatican II? Finally, consider how the teachings promulgated at Vatican II were received.

**Bibliography**


**Articles:**


**Topic: Christology**

This question will allow you to offer a critical reflection on the confession that Jesus is the Christ (Mk 8:29; Acts 2:36-38; John 20:31). In this question, you will explore the area of Christology from a multiplicity of perspectives, biblical, doctrinal, historical and modern. Consider the different views of Jesus as presented in the New Testament and teachings on Jesus from the Council of Chalcedon. Be prepared to also discuss current perspectives in the area of Christology. How did the early Christian communities understand Christ? How do people understand Christ today? What informs these perspectives? Is their continuity in these understandings? In your answer, use the doctrine of Chalcedon as a lens by which to view developments in our understanding of Christ.

**Bibliography**


**Articles:**


**Topic: Doctrine/Mystery of God**

The doctrine of the Trinity is, according to the Catholic Church, the “central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them” (CCC # 234). Trace the normative historical narrative of the formulation of a Trinitarian doctrine of the mystery of God from its biblical foundations up through major fourth century developments, including the Council of Nicaea and the Council of Constantinople, with particular attention to what is at stake for human salvation. How did extra-mural pressures affect or catalyze these developments? In your response, consider especially how theological language and categories function in Trinitarian reflection: how, for instance, do the concepts of “person” and “relation” develop in the history of the theology of the Trinity up to contemporary reflection (Cappadocians, Augustine, Rahner)? Employing at least two of the following figures, explore how the precision and specificity of the language employed in historical and theological ways of naming God as both unity and trinity relate to the broader notion of mystery as a positive category rather than simply a deficit of discursive knowledge (Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Pseudo-Dionysius, Bonaventure, Augustine, Rahner).

**Bibliography**


**Article**

----------. “The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology,” *Theological Investigations* 4.36-73
Topic: Christianity and World Religions

In your study of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam you have hopefully discovered a wisdom and holiness that is at least in part recognizable as wisdom and holiness from within the Christian perspective. That being said, what do you feel that the revelation of Jesus offers that is not contained in those other religions? Be prepared to articulate the way you understand revelation as conceived of in the Christian tradition and revelation as understood in the other world religions mentioned.

Bibliography


Paul Knitter, Introducing Theologies of Religions (Orbis, 2002).

Bradley Malkovsky, God’s Other Children: Personal Encounters with Faith, Love and Holiness in Sacred India (Harper One, 2013).

Articles & Article-length Items


Topic: Political & Liberation Theology

Political and liberation theology emerged during the nineteen-sixties, in Europe and in Latin America, respectively. This exam question considers the origins and development of these theologies, with particular attention to the ecclesial and socio-cultural contexts that shaped them. By attending to the bibliography below, please describe distinctive features of their approaches to two of the following three traditional theological themes (God, Christ, Salvation) and be able to compare and evaluate them in terms of their contexts.

Bibliography

The foundational question in medical ethics is about moral status and personhood. Before one can get into the complex questions of public policy, or even about killing or refusing to treat, one must ask a more fundamental question: "What is the moral status or value of the being or beings in question?" This is true for human embryos, early and later-term fetuses, newborn infants, older human beings with injuries and disabilities, those in a "brain dead" or persistently "vegetative" state. It is also true of non-human animals--from very simple ones like mice and rats, to very sophisticated primates and dolphins.

Most of our Western tradition's thought was dominated by the Aristotelian/Thomistic approach to moral status and value. This tradition (1) understood moral status to consist in being a "kind of thing" (a metaphysical claim) and (2) made a distinction between "substances of a rational nature" (humans) and "substances of an animal nature" (non-human animals). But with the Enlightenment and post-modernism comes a radical suspicion of metaphysics, and a struggle to handle different understandings of moral status and personhood in a pluralistic culture. This has shifted our understanding of personhood and moral status—not as being a kind of thing—but as a entity which currently has different kinds of actualized traits: autonomy, rationality, will, self-awareness, capacity to feel pleasure/pain, etc.

Think carefully about moral status and personhood as these concepts come to us today in the most important and controversial questions in medical ethics. How should the differences in the two approaches be resolved? Is one approach more convincing? How should we think about using these approaches in the public debates about medical ethics in our secular, pluralistic culture?

**Bibliography**


- 352-366, 377-387
- 623-662

Topic: Christian Ethics and Pastoral Practice – Human Sexuality, Christian Marriage and Family

Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and savior has practical implications for the way believers construe the world and organize their lives. At the core of this topic, you are asked to focus on what these implications are for Christian life in specific areas of life. You are asked to think about the tensions that arise from the attempt of the Christian community to remain faithful to the teachings of the Lord Jesus while trying to live a fully human life. In this question, you will (a) study the ethical stance of the Christian (Catholic) community on human sexuality, Christian marriage and family and the pastoral questions arising from the position of this community on these issues; (b) You will explore the ways pastoral workers can help to effectively translate Church teaching and moral theology; (c) Look at the moral demands that arise from the exercise of any pastoral ministry in the Church today. In your answer, you will seek to articulate church teaching in a way that speaks to the lived reality of Catholics/Christians in a parish community.

Bibliography


Articles:


Topic: Virtue Ethics.

Virtue ethics begins with the common human question: how can I be happy? Christians offer a distinctive answer in their account of the good life, in the role of ‘passions’ in making us happy, and finally in the diverse activities called ‘virtues’ that constitute happiness. You should be able to describe the following: the mutually constitutive identity of happiness and virtue; the (neglected) importance of the passions in making or
breaking our happiness; the differences between acquired virtue and infused virtue; the inner workings of fortitude and justice alongside extended examples; and the crucial role of friendship in the good life as articulated in charity.

Bibliography


**Topic: Catholic Social Tradition**

This topic explores the principle of the universal destination of created goods in the history of Catholic social thought. CST documents have articulated the ethical dimension of humans’ relationship to the goods of God’s creation in a manner reflecting the historical context specific to them. What informed Basil of Caesaria’s understanding of the right use of the goods of creation? With Aquinas’ treatment of private property in the background, what concerns regarding property did Leo XIII express in *Rerum novarum*? How does Benedict XVI’s understanding of the universal destination of created goods function in *Caritas in veritate* and in his 2010 World Day of Peace Message? How is the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, and of *Populorum progressio*, developed in Benedict’s thinking? In short, can you write an essay on the development of the teaching on the universal destination of created goods in CST over time, using some of these questions to help you?

Bibliography

Genesis, 1:1-2:4
Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* (1891)
*Gaudium et Spes* (1965)
Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (1967)
Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009)
Benedict XVI, “If you Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation” (World Day of Peace Message, January 1, 2010)
**Articles:**
Susan Holman, “Hunger, Famine, Relief and Identity in Basil’s Cappodocia,” *The Hungry are Dying*, pp. 64-98.

**Topic: Theology of the Body**
Blessed John Paul II’s Theology of the Body has famously been characterized in sensationalist terms as “a new sexual revolution” (Christopher West) and “a theological time-bomb set to go off with dramatic consequences… perhaps some time in the twenty-first century” (George Weigel). Promoters and detractors alike marshal hyperbolic language in order to either market or discredit the late pope’s teaching. This topic explores the ways in which the Theology of the Body is innovative, (for example in the exegesis of Genesis 1-3 and Matthew 5:27-32, and in the way that it relies on the teaching on sexuality as a portal into a fuller elucidation of God’s plans and purposes in creation) and also how, despite these innovations, it stands firmly in the Catholic tradition of sexual morality and Christian anthropology. The focus will be on the content of John Paul’s writing, and the ways in which it is a re-articulation of Catholic teaching for the new millennium.

**Bibliography**


**Articles:**

**Topic: Christian Moral Life**

This topic explores one of the foundational features of the renewal of moral theology after Vatican II, namely, the importance of happiness and virtue in the moral life. Explain the distinction between happiness in the “objective” sense as distinct from (not opposed to!) the “subjective” sense. According to Aquinas and Augustine, what is happiness in the objective sense and why? According to Aquinas, what is happiness in the subjective sense and why? Use Pinckaers and Mattison to explain how the beatitudes can be understood in the context of objective and subjective happiness. Also explain how virtue is related to happiness and why it is important to distinguish between supernatural (infused) and natural (acquired) virtues.

**Books**
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* i.7
Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II 2,4 & 8; 3,1 & 4; 4,5 & 8; 5,3 & 5; 55,4; 57,4; 58,2 & 4 & 5; 59,2 & 61,2-3
St. Augustine, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church* i.2-15
Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor* I

**Articles**


**Studies in Spirituality**

**Topic: Thomas Merton (will retire in summer 2016)**

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) is one of the most influential Catholic writers of the 20th century. In his ever-popular *New Seeds of Contemplation,* Merton seeks to help us prepare the soil of our souls to receive the seeds “of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men.” In the opening chapters of this same work Merton described what he meant by contemplation and what he did not mean by the concept. This topic invites you to write an essay in which you outline that distinction, and, second, in which you investigate what Thomas Merton meant by the distinction between the "true" and the "false" self.

**Bibliography:**

Topic: Teresa of Avila: Saint and Doctor of the Church

Two figures from the Iberian Peninsula, Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Avila, did in the sixteenth century what had failed over in the late middle ages—an enduring reform of consecrated life. Ignatius did so through the creation of the Society of Jesus while Teresa of Jesus did so by her reform of the Carmelite Order, reforms that challenged their followers to commit to a life of transforming prayer. Teresa, as the first female doctor of the church, has been recognized for her teaching on prayer that has significance for the whole church. Teresa, the storyteller of the mystical life, supplied for her daughters what they had been deprived of: classical texts on prayer especially her masterpiece, The Interior Castle. Teresa and her collaborator, John of the Cross, had a defining impact on the formation of the West’s mystical theology. Teresa cast her teaching in the symbols and language of Bridal Mysticism.

There are important questions to be explored about the life and writings of Teresa. What gifts made it possible for this woman to carry out such a successful reform of her order despite implacable odds? What is Teresa’s place in the history of meditation with her description of contemplative meditation called by her (active) recollection? How well did Teresa handle the bugbear of mystical phenomena? Is, as some have claimed, Teresa’s description of the mystical journey too psychological and not theological enough? What wisdom for the ordinary Christian does Teresa unpack from her mystical journey that culminates in spiritual betrothal and spiritual marriage? What kind of Christology does Teresa offer her readers with her emphasis on the humanity of Christ? What kind of Trinitarian theology marks Teresa’s journey? Teresa tells her readers that Augustine sent her within; how Augustinian is her theology of grace? Without a bible of her own, how then did Teresa develop a robust biblical imagination? Teresa quite clearly centered her life and teachings on God’s lavish love. How did love shape Teresa’s teachings on consecrated community and her theology of prayer, contemplative and otherwise?

Bibliography


Article:
**Topic: Contemplation and Action**

This question will focus on the relationship between prayer and action in a Christian's spiritual life. The tendency in the Christian tradition has been to see prayer as superior to action, since it is the focal point in this life of the union with God that is our destiny in the next. However, there have been innovative attempts in the history of the tradition to break down overly rigid barriers between these two essential components of the Christian life. As you approach your answer, consider the discussion in Greek thought of the distinction between *theoria* and *praxis*. Then consider how this conceptual pair was taken over in the history of Christian spirituality and complemented by Scriptural interpretation, looking at some classical understandings of the relationship between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. What have been different approaches to the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* in the patristic and medieval periods? Remember, it is important to note the context within which the author writes. This is relevant for understanding how he/she approaches the relationship between prayer and action. In your answer, you will be asked to reflect on three of the following writers: Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, Catherine of Sienna, and/or Ignatius of Loyola. In offering a modern reading of the relationship between prayer and action, consult the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez.

**Bibliography**


**Article-length Items:**


Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.


Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II.II: Q 179, Q 180.1-5, 8; QQ 181, 182.

Topic: Prayer

This topic is designed as an invitation to examine Christian prayer. In 1 Thessalonians Saint Paul exhorts Christians to “pray ceaselessly.” How did early church theologians such as Origen, John Cassian and Augustine understand this exhortation? Moreover, to look at more specific texts, these same three theologians each wrote brief commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer. Why? And, more specifically, how did they interpret the difficult petition "Give us this day our daily bread"?

Bibliography

Origen, Treatise on Prayer
John Cassian, Conference IX
Augustine, Letter to Proba

Topic: John of the Cross: Poet and Mystic

Christianity has produced extraordinary mystics like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. The last named, John of the Cross (1542-1591), saint and doctor of the Church, can be described as a mystic’s mystic whose writings along with those of Teresa of Avila shaped the contours of modern Western Mystical Theology. Moreover, the texts of John of the Cross constitute a locus theologicus, a source and place from which to theologize. The poetry of Juan de la Cruz has been accorded worldwide acclaim and his commentaries contain theological insights that have enriched theological discourse about the spiritual life, e.g., the role of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual life, deification, the dark nights, suffering, transforming love, the mystical as making one fully human, human destiny as participation in the life and love of the Triune God?

The poetry and commentaries of John of the Cross are major resources for understanding the Christian mystical tradition and for articulating how this mystical tradition can enrich the ministries of the church, a church now challenged to become a more contemplative church as was prophetically perceived by Thomas Merton.

Reflection on the texts of John of the Cross raises many questions: What meaning is there in John of the Cross’ extraordinary mystical encounters? What can we learn from John about everyday, sacramental mysticism? How can one overcome the common perception of harshness in John? How can one share with others the stunningly beautiful poetry of John of the Cross as a revelation of God’s lavish love, of beauty as an avenue to the divine, How can one pray with John’s poetry? Is the Bridal Mysticism of John of the Cross no longer viable in a sex-soaked culture as some have asserted?

Bibliography


**Article**