

# A Roman Exam Period: *Time to Face Facts*

*Our author Rev. Mr. Jeff Kirby (Diocese of Charleston '07) shows where most of the hours in exam period are spent.*

In my first exam period at the Gregorian University, I thought I had it all figured out. It was a Christology exam, and I had read through the lecture notes and memorized the principal themes and points of the course. I was ready for my first Roman exam. Or so I thought.

In the Roman University system, an entire course is determined by one 10-minute oral exam with the professor at the end of the semester's lectures. Unlike our American University system, where a final exam may not even be comprehensive, or where a final exam is perhaps 20 percent of an overall grade, in the Roman system the course rises or falls based solely on the final exam. Grades are given on a scale of one to 10, with a "six" passing the course. The grade

received on the final exam is the grade received for the course. For the most part, there are no papers, quizzes, class participation, or midterm grades to buffer the single grade of a final exam.

Yes, I thought I had it all figured out. So, off I went to the university for my first exam in Christology. I sat down in the room with the professor, and he asked his first question. I couldn't have prepared myself for the hot seat of an exam, and my mind went blank. I knew I was staring, and I felt myself starting to blush. I couldn't say anything. I wanted to leave the room. This wasn't suppose to happen. I was prepared. I had it all figured out.

Thanks be to God, the professor was a gentle American, and he understood this type of testing was unique to me and my classmates. He smiled, leaned forward, and - tapping the desk - simply said, "Relax." Then he leaned back and repeated his question.

I laughed and even said, "This is awkward." By then, my mind overcame its shock, and I began to answer his question on the New Testament understanding of the term "Messiah." The exam went well, and I went back to the seminary ready for a nap.

The other exams of that first exam period were uncomfortable, but not as shocking as that first one. Since then, as I finish my last exam schedule for the Bachelors of Sacred Theology, the oral exams have become a welcomed means of testing, and even a highlight of the Roman system's training in theology. This surprises no one more than myself.

No system is perfect. Each has its weaknesses and strengths. While the American system of

*The Gregorian University's double-sided information boards help guide students on their way to exams. Now the Gregorian has all exam information on the internet, but in the past students relied almost exclusively on boards like these.*



extended course work may lend itself to better integration, the Roman system seems to better prepare students to always have an answer ready. The goal, of course, for the priest of the New Evangelization is both the integration of theological knowledge and a readiness to effectively share with others the truths of that knowledge.

Oral exams are both loved and hated by mutually good people. Regardless of personal preferences for or against them, they are a regular and almost permanent part of the Roman university system. The best way to deal with them is to try to have things figured out and to walk readily through them.

**Rev. Mr. Jeff Kirby | Diocese of Charleston | Class of 2007**



*LEFT: The anxiety before a big oral exam can be overwhelming. Ryan Moravitz (Diocese of Duluth '08) shows us how he feels before heading into the famous 2nd-year Canon Law exam with Gianfranco Ghirlanda S.J., Rector of the Gregorian. TOP: Hector Lopez-Tejeda (Diocese of Fresno '09) and Greg Loughney (Diocese of Scranton '09) celebrate another exam done with some coffee in the bar of the Gregorian.*