

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
THE MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

May 2011

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD

Part 1: Statistical Information

A total of 480 students registered for the May Intermediate examination in Religious Knowledge. When compared to the examination conducted in the previous year, there was an increase of 23 students who registered for this exam.

**Table 1: MATSEC Intermediate Level Religious Knowledge, May 2011
Distribution of Grades**

Grades	A	B	C	D	E	F	Absent	TOTAL
No .of Candidates	16	68	137	123	64	55	17	480
Total %	3.3	14.2	28.5	25.6	13.3	11.5	3.5	100

Part 2: Comments regarding Students' Performance

Even though, when plotted on a curve, the results produce an almost normal distribution, the examiners feel that there is still much room for improvement. This improvement can be achieved if students are able to delve deeper into the themes covered in the syllabus. From the scripts, it is evident that many students reproduce nearly verbatim the notes which they have taken during lessons. This can be seen from the fact that the scripts can be grouped according to the classes which the individual students attended in their particular schools. In this situation, it is unfortunate to see that some students could not go beyond what they had studied by off heart in order to give a better answer to the question/s asked by the examiners. This poses very serious questions regarding the type and the method of teaching which is being conducted at this post-secondary level, where candidates are expected to apply, analyse and evaluate the information which they acquire during lessons, and not just remember it by heart. Candidates should be challenged to be critical of what they learn, and to form their own opinion.

When one takes a look at the scripts, one also notes the lack of essay writing skills. Candidates express their ideas in a haphazard way, thus lacking continuity, logic and at times even meaning. It is unfortunate to note that a substantial number of answers lack the maturity expected for this level; others were extremely brief and thus expressing no in-depth knowledge of the concepts being discussed. This demonstrates a lack of study by the candidates since candidates are expected to give their answers at acceptable lengths, thus expressing themselves in a better and clearer way.

Remarks on Specific Questions

Candidates had to answer Question 1 and another three questions of their choice from 5. An analysis of the frequencies of responses to the questions and the mean score obtained for each question is revealing.

Table 2: Analysis of candidates' performance on each question

	N	% of total candidates answering the question	Maximum possible mark	Lowest mark obtained	Highest mark obtained	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1	463	100%	31	7	31	21.5	4.82
Q2	325	70.2%	23	1	23	14.5	4.34
Q3	286	61.8%	23	3	23	15.7	4.01
Q4	333	71.9%	23	4	22	15.6	3.10
Q5	147	31.8%	23	4	22	13.6	4.10
Q6	294	63.5%	23	2	23	12.9	3.66

Question 1

This question was divided into 15 short questions. The following is an in-depth analysis of how the students answered each part of the question:

- i. Although a considerable number of students answered well, there were also a good number of others who confused the “*fall of the angels*” with the “*fall of human beings*”, i.e. that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Some even saw this “fall” as something positive and wrote that it referred to those instances when God sent angels to particular persons in order to communicate with them ex. the angel Gabriel who appeared to Mary. Among those who answered correctly, some gave only partially correct answers as they did not specify that this fall was essentially one caused by disobedience and/or pride (supervja) directed towards God.
- ii. A majority of students answered correctly and showed that they understood the dynamics within the patriarchal kind of family in the Middle East at the time of Jesus where cousins and relatives were referred to as brothers and sisters. However, there was also a considerable number of students who stated hypothetical claims and conclusions of certain theories as though they were historical facts ex. that Joseph had other children from another woman.
- iii. To this question only a small number of students provided a full correct answer. There were students who equated the “Tradition of the Church” with some Church practices that persisted in the Catholic Church since the first centuries. For others the “Tradition of the Church” is only constituted of the Sacrament of Baptism and/or the Eucharist that were instituted by Christ and continued to be celebrated throughout the centuries.
- iv. A large majority of students gave a correct and satisfactory answer to this question. They described euthanasia as “mercy-killing”, distinguished between active and passive euthanasia, drew an extremely fine line between euthanasia and suicide, and some went even further, showing why this practice is immoral and unacceptable to the moral teachings of the Church.
- v. A large majority of students gave a full satisfactory answer to this question and mentioned the two most important aspects of the Sacrament of Reconciliation namely that it restores the person’s relationship with God and with the Christian community. Quite a good number of students even explained how sin causes a conflict with God, with other human beings, with creation, and within the person himself, and therefore the sacrament of Reconciliation restores one’s relationship to all of these.

- vi. A considerable number of students answered correctly and wrote that man was created in God's own image and likeness. Some of these went further and linked this fundamental truth to the fact that God, out of his love for, and trust in man, gave him the stewardship of creation. However, this link was not made by all students.
- vii. A large amount of students answered this question by mentioning only the Apostles to whom Jesus conferred his authority to celebrate the Eucharistic celebration. That answer was considered fully correct as it answered the question. However, there were some students who even mentioned bishops and all those who received the sacrament of the Holy Orders, like priests.
- viii. Most of the students answered correctly and satisfactorily to this question, giving procreation and mutual love and intimacy as the ends of Catholic marriage. However, there were quite a few students who misunderstood the question and mentioned death and annulment as the ends of marriage. They thought that the question was asking them how a Catholic marriage could end.
- ix. Quite a good number of students answered correctly, referring to the list of inspired books that we find in the Bible. However, there were also quite a good number of incorrect answers which mentioned the authors of the Bible, the Deutero-canonical books or even some Biblical figures as the definition of the canonical books. Some even wrote very generic statements, like "the Biblical books that are important to our lives."
- x. A large majority of students gave a correct answer to this question. They mentioned euthanasia, abortion, suicide, murder, genocide, unjust war, excessive alcohol and drugs, inflicting serious emotional pain and others. However, some students had a wrong answer as they confused the fifth commandment with either the sixth or the seventh and hence gave incorrect examples.
- xi. The large majority of students gave the right answer, i.e. Saint Luke. Only a few mentioned another name and thus gave a wrong answer.
- xii. Almost all students gave the right answer, naming Jesus Christ as the "eternally begotten of the Father." Only a few students answered incorrectly, mentioning God the Father or the Holy Spirit.
- xiii. Almost all students answered correctly. Many said that Baptism takes away original sin, or that it gives God's grace and the individual becomes a full member of the People of God and the Body of Christ.
- xiv. There were quite a good number of students who got this question right, saying that a strike can be justified only after all other means had been tried and/or when the positive outcomes of the strike would outweigh completely the negative consequences. However, there were many students who said that a strike could be justified when rights were violated, without saying whether other means had been tried to solve the problems. This was considered as incorrect.
- xv. Many students gave the right answer to this question by mentioning the conflict and dilemma that the issue of circumcision raised between Jewish Christians, represented by Peter, and Gentiles who converted to Christianity, represented by Paul. Some just mentioned circumcision, some even explained what the real issue was. There were several different levels of details in the answers of students, reflecting the different levels of knowledge. Some even mentioned and related the issue of circumcision to the issue of what kinds of food Christians could be morally justified to eat. There were only a few students who gave a completely wrong answer.

Question 2

Question 2 dealt with revelation and students were asked about revelation. Although nearly all students were prepared with regards to the way God revealed himself to humanity, giving a detailed narration of the four stages; when it came to explaining the meaning of revelation, students generally lacked the basic concepts given by the Catechism of the Catholic Church which was the basic textbook for this examination. The two most important biblical figures, Abraham and Mary, were mostly neglected.

Question 3

The third question dealt with chastity and Christian life in general. When tackling chastity most students based their answers on the various states of chastity rather than on what chastity really means.

Chastity in married life was only explained by a few candidates. Most candidates think that only priests, nuns and unmarried people are called to live a life of chastity.

Most students gave a detailed description of the offences against chastity as found in the Catechism, especially when it came to pornography. Most students knew how those engaged to marry should live their life of chastity.

Question 4

Question 4 was about the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. The nature of this question was more theoretical, and student's knowledge about the Sacraments was tested. Although almost everyone could answer all parts of this question, it seemed that the knowledge came from other sources rather than the Catechism of the Catholic Church, such as catechism classes or lessons during secondary school. Nevertheless, the answers given were acceptable because fair arguments were presented.

Question 5

Question 5 was about the Church as the People of God as this is presented to us in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. It was divided into 2 parts. Most students answered satisfactorily or quite so to this first part of the question. They mentioned Baptism and how it makes every individual part of one big family of God and the Church, giving to the baptized a share in Christ's kingship, prophetic and priestly missions with all the responsibilities that come out of these. Some explained how faith in Jesus Christ and the call for evangelization made us one people of God united to each other. They also related the Church as People of God to it being also the Mystical Body of Christ with Jesus Christ as the Head and all the baptized constituting the different organs of this Body, each having its roles and functions, that contribute towards the well being of the whole Body. Some students even mentioned, explained and compared the People of God in the Old and New Testaments (the Old and the New People of God), although many of them were unable to show a clear understanding of the continuity between the two of them. Very few students mentioned and explained, even briefly, all these points. Most of them took just two of them and explained them.

A considerable number of students provided quite satisfactory answers for the second part of this question, although only very few of them mentioned and explained, even briefly, ALL the important elements in the building up of the Church, found in the Acts of the Apostles. However,

there were also a good number of respondents to this question who misinterpreted or misunderstood the question completely, thus giving completely incorrect answers. Some mentioned the qualities of the physical churches and wrote about architectural qualities. Others simply wrote what they thought would be feasible as a correct answer, and gave a lot of generic statements, without actually referring to the Acts of the Apostles written by St. Luke.

Question 6

Question 6 was divided into three main parts. The first part dealt with God's Plan of Salvation. The intention of this question was to check the student's knowledge on the Old Testament. Students were expected to explain this plan of salvation in brief by referring to the Old Testament, and mentioning various people called by God to serve him. Most students failed to do this and answered only the part where God's Plan reached its culmination in Jesus Christ by stating that mankind was saved through Jesus. The majority failed to refer to the most important characters of the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses (and the Sinai Covenant), David, the Prophets, and finally Jesus Christ. This led to the fact that many students lost marks in this part.

The second part of this question dealt with the theme of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Most students did well in this part, however there were only a few who could mention all types of power shown by Jesus (on nature, illness, death, demons, and sin). With regards to the humanity of Jesus, most did well too, however it was disappointing that a few of them referred to basic traits shown by Jesus (crying, hunger without referring to other important ones). Nevertheless, this part was the part where students obtained most marks.

The third part was about the heresies on the Incarnation of Jesus. Students did well in this part too, they could mention various heretics and the nature of the heresy. However, a great percentage could not mention any Church documents issued to respond to the heresies.