

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
THE MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

May 2012

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD

Part 1: Statistical Information

A total of 446 students registered for the May Intermediate examination in Religious Knowledge. When compared to the examination conducted in the previous year, there was a decrease of 34 students who registered for this exam.

**Table 1: MATSEC Intermediate Level Religious Knowledge, May 2012
Distribution of Grades**

Grades	A	B	C	D	E	F	Absent	TOTAL
No .of Candidates	18	61	134	110	54	58	11	446
Total %	4.0	13.7	30.0	24.7	12.1	13.0	2.5	100

Part 2: Comments regarding Students' Performance

The examiners feel that there is still much room for improvement by the candidates sitting for this examination. An improvement is to be expected over the coming years. This improvement can be achieved if students are able to delve deeper into the themes covered in the syllabus. The scripts produced by the students demonstrate that many reproduce the notes which they have taken during lessons nearly word for word. This is evident from the fact that batches of scripts can be grouped together for having similar answers, probably according to the classes which 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 candidates' ability to analyse and evaluate the information which they acquire during the lectures. Candidates ought to be challenged to be more critical of what they learn, and to form their own opinion about the subject matter being discussed.

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. Candidates are expected to give answers at acceptable lengths, thus expressing themselves in a better and clearer way.

Moreover, block answers for whole questions should be avoided by the candidates. In order to help candidates produce better focussed answers, the examiners divide questions into further sub-questions. These are aimed at helping the student to give a more detailed and focussed answer. From the scripts, one notes that students disregard these divisions, thus making it harder for themselves to give the answer which the examiners are expecting without losing a lot of time and energy on unnecessary information, which although may be correct, but is usually irrelevant for examination purposes, and does not further their grades.

We would also like to encourage the students to read the questions well before attempting at giving an answer. We have found several instances where we asked for something particular and

the candidates answered about something which is very similar. A case in point was a question about ‘sacramentals’. Some candidates answered giving the sacraments as examples. This shows a lack of attention when reading the questions and does not help students in scoring high grades.

Remarks on Specific Questions

Candidates had to answer all questions in Section A and to choose another 3 questions of their choice from 5 in Section B. 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
Section A	435	100%	40	1	39	25
Section B						
Q1	274	63%	20	1	20	15
Q2	273	63%	20	3	20	12
Q3	133	31%	20	1	18	7
Q4	292	67%	20	5	20	13
Q5	324	75%	20	5	20	15

Section A

This section was divided into 10 short questions where candidates were asked to answer in brief, paragraph form. The following is an in-depth analysis of how the students answered each question in this section:

1. Although a considerable number of students answered this question in a correct manner, others did not relate sufficiently the concept of faith to the teachings of Jesus and his Church. Moreover, the credibility of the faith (that is, the relationship between faith and reason) was rather absent in the answers provided. Students should ensure that the characteristics of faith should be informed by the lasting relationship with the loving God as revealed in the history of salvation.
2. The majority of students answered accurately and showed that they understood the *modus operandi* of the sacrament of reconciliation and that all baptised need divine grace to heal the wounds of sin and restore their relationship with God and with the Christian community. Candidates have shown a reasonable understanding of the basic concepts of this sacrament including the harm sin causes in one’s life, the founding of this sacrament by Christ, the sinful nature of the human person, the process of conversion and repentance. This sacrament was generally presented as a return to communion with God wherein the Christian receives the new life of Christ.
3. This was one of the questions that almost all students could answer without any difficulty. Jesus is presented as the one who teaches us to pray to the Father and that

prayer means placing one's complete trust in God. Most students identified and highlighted the multifaceted presentation of prayer including one's preparation, the personal and communitarian dimension in prayer, to pray without ceasing, the different forms of prayer and doing God's will while avoiding temptation.

4. Only a relative minority of students did not know that a morally good act requires the goodness of its object, of its end, and of its circumstances *together*. Nonetheless, they were aware of the fact that there are three "sources" of the morality of human acts (that is, the object, the intention and the circumstance). Students in general, have shown the difference between what constitutes a morally good act and what is morally evil. Some added that one may not do evil so that good may result from it.
5. A large majority of students gave a full satisfactory answer to this question and mentioned important aspects of the Sacrament of marriage that include faithfulness in definitive mutual giving and the indissolubility of marriage. The permanent nature of marriage was also highlighted. The majority explained that the fidelity or the intimate union of marriage is also ordered to the generation, education and the good of the children as well as to the sanctity of the spouses. In addition, some have also referred to the notion of the domestic Church wherein believing families are of primary importance as centres of living radiating faith.
6. Very few students answered this question correctly. The large majority of the students understood Tradition not in the sense of the Apostolic Tradition but as the oral traditions that preceded the writing of Scripture, in a general sense. Very few students wrote about the actual relationship between the two, the way they both make present the Mystery of Christ through the Church, the fact that both have the same divine source and that together they make up the one deposit of faith that has been transmitted both orally and in writing since the time of the Apostles. Some students mentioned the word 'Revelation' but many of these still did not understand the connection between the two sources.
7. Most students got the answer to this question right. They are aware that this sacrament can be received by any Christian who is very fragile and in danger of dying because of grave illness and/or old age. Many also mentioned the fact that the sacrament can be received by the person more than once and that it confers a special grace that is translated into the kind of strength that the patient would need at the moment, be it physical, psychological and/or spiritual.
8. Most students started answering this question by defining sin as the rupture that is created between man and God, his fellow human beings, his environment and within himself. This occurs when man does not follow God's commandments and gets carried away by his own pride. Many students then went on to define mortal and venial sin, bringing out the difference between the two. The majority understand that venial sin is not grave as mortal sin and that it could be forgiven by reciting genuinely the act of contrition and/or through the power of the Mass to forgive sins. On the other, mortal sin gravely affects the relationship between God and man not only because of its inherent gravity but also

because the person concerned knows exactly what s/he is doing and understands the gravity of the act. This last point was mentioned by a fewer number of students.

9. Most students understand that prayer is personal form of communication between the person and God. This makes man's soul experience exaltation in intimacy with God who is by definition, Trinitarian in nature. This implies that all prayer should take place in the name of the Trinitarian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through prayer God bestows his grace and goodness on the person who approaches the Lord with an open and sincere heart. A small number of students even mentioned communal and liturgical prayer, especially when the Christian community gathers for the celebration of the Eucharist. A considerable number of students even distinguished between the different kinds of prayer.
10. Many students gave a partially correct answer to this question. They mentioned the fact that God created man free and created everything good. Therefore, God did not create, nor was he somehow responsible for the existence of evil. Evil and suffering are only the result of man abusing the freedom conferred to him by God Almighty. But few students mentioned and explained how the mystery of the presence of evil and the suffering associated with it, was enlightened by Jesus Christ, especially through his passion, death and resurrection, through which he emerged victorious over the moral evil that man was responsible for in the first place.

Section B

Question 1: This question was about the Sacraments of Initiation. The majority of the students seemed to be well-prepared for such a question. In the first part of the question the students gave a lot of detail about the catechumenate which was present during the early centuries of the Church, and how candidates prepared themselves for the Sacraments of Initiation, which were all given at the same time.

The students were also well-aware of the effects of the Sacrament of Baptism. With regards to the third part of the question which dealt with the Sacrament of Confirmation, the students narrated what happened on Pentecost but they stopped short of explaining how the same Holy Spirit, on descending on the individual, gives the person the strength to remain strong in the faith in everyday life.

In the last part of the question, the students were asked to mention and explain two names by which we refer to the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Many students were able to do this and to explain the names given to the Eucharist as well.

Question 2: Many students failed to read the first part of this question well. The question was on the teaching of the Church on the transmission of life and not on the respect which everybody should have for the life of the human being. Any information given by the students about abortion, euthanasia, legitimate defence, suicide and physical health were irrelevant.

In the second part of the question, the students did not understand the distinction between natural sterilisation and therapeutic sterilisation. The majority of the students claimed that sterility is against the will of God, and thus it is unacceptable for the Church. The students who said that a possible solution for natural sterility can be found in the possibility of adoption, or if this

possibility does not exist, the parents offer the pain which such a situation brings about and join it to that of Christ, were very few.

The students were well-prepared about IVF and were aware of the medical process which this involves. However, they failed to distinguish between homologous artificial insemination and heterogonous artificial insemination. Still, the majority of students knew about the position of the Church with regards to IVF.

Question 3: In this question, candidates were asked to explain man's call to be in communion with God. The question was divided into four main parts: i) man's capacity of God; ii) man's desire for God; iii) the two ways of coming to know God; iv) knowledge of God according to the Church.

Many students did not give the traditional answers found in the suggested text book. It seems that only a very small percentage were familiar with the fact that man is open to God's revelation, that conscience helps the human person to understand what God wants from him. Only a few recalled that God takes the initiative to enter in a relationship with humans, and keeps calling us despite us disobeying Him. The two ways of coming to know God, which are creation and the human person, were left out by the vast majority.

It seemed that students preferred to explain other points, such as Revelation, Abraham and the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ as God's last revelation. The desire for God and the knowledge of God were mostly left out.

Question 4: This question was about the Liturgy and the signs used in the Sacraments. In the first part, students were asked to explain the main sections of the Liturgical Calendar and the main events related to them. Although the sections were answered satisfactorily, some events related to them were somehow left out. A common exemplar is the Easter period. One was expected to mention the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday and the fact that our Lord instituted two Sacraments that night. It was also expected that candidates refer to Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which marks the start of the Holy Week.

The second part of the question asked about the sacramentals of the Church and the symbols used during Sacraments. Students were confident in answering about the symbols used in the Sacraments, and gave various examples (with water, candle, chrism/oil, white robe, and laying of hands being the most popular with students). However, it seemed that the majority did not know what the sacramentals are.

Question 5: Question 5 themed about the Lord's Prayer, a new topic in the Intermediate Matriculation Syllabus for this year (chapters 31-37). Although this was a new topic, this question was attempted by many. Most answers were satisfactory. Students were able to point out the seven petitions of this prayer, and explain them in brief as well. They also explained how Jesus referred to God as his Father, and how this changed our relationship with Him, where God became our Father too. Most students did well.

Chairperson

Examination Panel 2012