

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

**THE MATRICULATION EXAMINATION
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL**

**RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE
MAY 2014**

EXAMINERS' REPORT

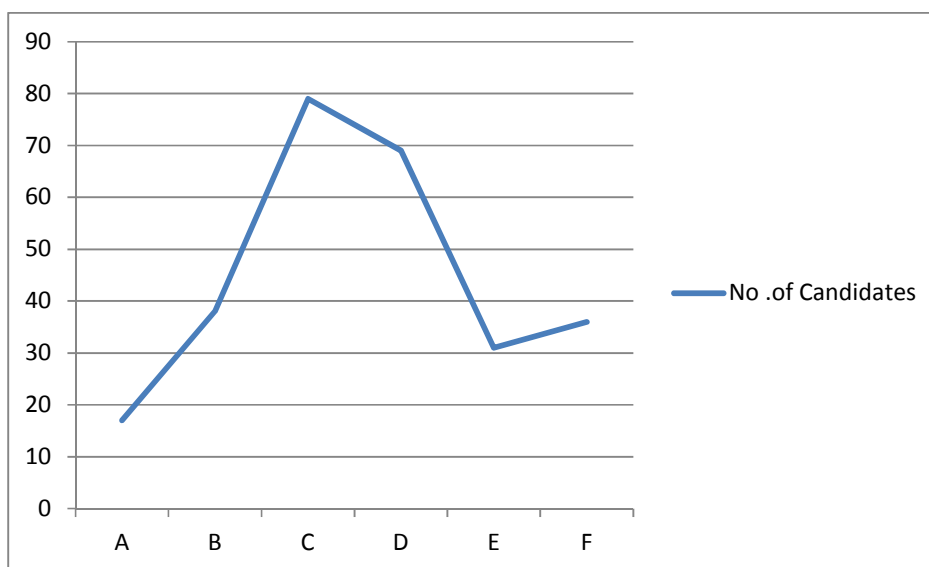
**IM RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE
MAY 2014 SESSION
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Part 1: Statistical Information

A total of 286 students registered for the May Intermediate examination in Religious Knowledge. When compared to the examination conducted in the previous year, there was a drastic drop in the number of students who registered and sat for the Intermediate Religion Examination. This is a drop of 118 candidates.

**Table 1: MATSEC Intermediate Level Religious Knowledge, May 2014
Distribution of Grades**

| GRADE | A | B | C | D | E | F | abs | TOTAL |
|------------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-------|
| NUMBER | 17 | 40 | 78 | 69 | 30 | 36 | 16 | 286 |
| % OF TOTAL | 5.9 | 14.0 | 27.3 | 24.1 | 10.5 | 12.6 | 5.6 | 100 |



Part 2: Comments regarding Students' Performance

When analysing the data distribution on this graph, although the form is of a normal N-shaped graph, the examiners feel that there is still much room for improvement by the candidates sitting for this examination. The improvement can be achieved if students are able to delve deeper into the themes covered in the syllabus and not simply repeating verbatim the notes which they have taken during lectures. 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. Some candidates even went as far as proposing their answer to questions which were never 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.

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. Every year, we feel the need to make students aware that block answers for whole questions should be avoided, and they should answer each part of the question marked differently in a clear way, and distinguishing their answers by clearly stating which part of the question they are answering. 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.

As examiners we would also like to encourage the students to read the questions well before attempting at giving an answer. A lack of attention when reading the questions does not help students in scoring high grades by giving punctual answers to questions.

Remarks on Specific Questions

Candidates had to answer all 10 questions in Section A and to choose another 3 questions of their choice from 5 in Section B. The questions in Section A carried 4 marks each, making a total of 40% of the entire weight of the marks. Each question in Section B carried 20 marks, thus Section B had a weight of 60% of the entire marks. 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 | Standard Deviation |
|-----------|-----|--|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Section A | 269 | 94.1% | 40 | 3 | 40 | 7.3 |
| Section B | | | | | | |
| Q1 | 125 | 43.7% | 20 | 4 | 20 | 4.1 |
| Q2 | 109 | 38.1% | 20 | 7 | 20 | 3 |
| Q3 | 199 | 69.6% | 20 | 3 | 20 | 4.1 |
| Q4 | 204 | 71.3% | 20 | 6 | 20 | 3.1 |
| Q5 | 169 | 59.1% | 20 | 2 | 20 | 4 |

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, and a general comment at the very end.

Question 1: Why does the Church disagree with the Protestant teaching of 'Sola Scriptura'?

Most answers to this question were incorrect. Most students do not know what the term 'Sola Scriptura' means. A considerable number of them defined it as the Protestant literal interpretation of Scripture. For others, the term signifies the Protestant understanding and structure of Scripture, including the number of inspired books in it, the omission of certain books that are included in the Catholic canonical list, and the inclusion of apocryphal books. There were also answers which mentioned the word 'Tradition' or 'traditions' in a cultural sense. Few were those who answered correctly and mentioned the importance of the Apostolic Tradition as part of Revelation, which Protestants do not accept. Even fewer answers specified the fact that such Tradition leads to salvation.

Question 2: What is faith?

Most answers to this question specified the conditions of faith and its relationship with reason and science. Most of them made reference to the fact that faith is a theological virtue and that it is belief in 'things we do not see physically'. However, only few answers specifically stated that faith is the positive response of the human being to a personal call that comes from God, and is therefore constituted by a personal relationship with God that enlightens one's life and obliges one to live according to God's call and will, out of love.

Question 3: Name two dogmas about Mary.

Most students mentioned and some of them even explained two correct dogmas about Mary. The most commonly mentioned were the dogma of Mary as the '*mother of God*' (some even wrote the Greek word 'theotokos') and of the '*Immaculate Conception*'. Others mentioned the dogma that Mary remained a virgin even while and after giving birth to Jesus – the dogma of the '*Virgin Mary*'. However, most of those who explained these dogmas, despite that it was not required of them to do so, defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as Mary's birth without original sin. No marks were deducted as they were only expected to '**name**' the dogmas.

Question 4: Name and explain a parable of Jesus which shows that the rich should care for the poor.

The large majority of the students mentioned the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Most of them also gave a detailed and correct description of the parable and reflected about the importance of charity by every Christian who takes his faith seriously. They said that it is God's wish and commandment that the rich should help the poor in any way they can, not only financially. However, there were some students who had an idea of the parable but did not mention the name Lazarus and a number of important details of the parable. A few others mentioned some other parable, especially that of the Good Samaritan.

Question 5: What is the full and definitive stage of God's Revelation?

Most students answered this question correctly by stating clearly that God's full and definitive stage of Revelation occurred when God's Word was made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Many answers were quite long as they recounted briefly how God revealed Himself to mankind throughout the history of salvation that one can find in the Old Testament. At the end they explained how Jesus marked the fullness of God's revelation, and most of them specified that this was accomplished through Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

Question 6: Mention two symbols of the Holy Spirit.

Almost all the students answered this question correctly. They mentioned wind, the dove that appeared at Jesus' Baptism, the tongues of fire that are mentioned in the Pentecost narrative (or just fire), water, the cloud which guides and through which God speaks, and the laying of hands through which the Holy Spirit is bestowed on someone.

Question 7: What is the difference between divorce and annulment?

Most students know the difference between these two realities that are related to a Catholic marriage. They mentioned the fact that divorce is the breaking of a valid marriage relationship that is accepted by the State but not by the Church, whereas annulment is a relationship that never constituted a valid marriage relationship, and therefore the person could marry in the Church. However, there were also some students who confused the two realities, or even who expressed personal opinions that are not compatible with what the Catholic Church teaches.

Question 8: In what way is everyone called to live chastity?

This was one of the questions that was answered incorrectly by the large majority of students. Many of them did not know what chastity means. Some said it means living a good life, others wrote that it is the obedience and poverty that religious people live in their communities, others said that it is something that should only be lived by religious people, others even related chastity to other things that have got nothing to do with it. Other answers stated that it means living according to the Gospel and Jesus' teachings without specifying how and without making any mention to sexuality. Others mentioned sexuality and living it according to God's Will, but did not specify how and by whom.

Question 9: What are charisms?

Only a small percentage of students could answer this question correctly and specified that charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit which are bestowed on individuals for the good of the Church and of society in general. Other students only mentioned one or two elements of this definition. Most of these knew that charisms are gifts of the Holy Spirit, but were unaware of the reasons why these are given. They stated that their main aim was the sanctity of the person who possessed them. A significant number of students however did not know the meaning of the word and confused charisms with other things such as miracles, aptitudes and qualities of one's personality, theological virtues, and even ecclesial posts and offices.

Question 10: What is the sense of the petition "Give us this day our daily bread"?

Most students gave partially correct answers to this question. Almost everyone said that through this part of the 'Our Father' we ask God to provide us with our daily living and help us make a living. Only a few spoke of the importance of having a child's filial trust in God through which we recognize how good God is, beyond all goodness. Even fewer students mentioned the importance of asking for grace to know how to act so that justice and solidarity may allow the abundance of some to remedy the needs of others. A few students gave an unsatisfactory answer because they referred to or even wrote down other parts of the Lord's Prayer without explaining at all its part that was in the question.

General Comments:

Some students seemed to be quite prepared for the exam and must have studied well. However, it was observed that many of the students' answers were similar and studied by heart. It seems that many students memorize the notes that are provided by their teachers and just reproduce them on the examination script. There were certain questions which many students did not answer well because they did not have any idea of the meaning of the word or the term. This shows clearly that a considerable number of students are very selective as to what they read and study, and most of them rely too much on studying by heart. It is quite disappointing to note the lack of students' skills in evaluating, analyzing and applying what they've learnt to different contexts. Most of them could not provide answers with a certain level of depth. Some even demonstrated a low level of maturity, in the sense that they study in a mechanical way, without really reflecting upon and assimilating what they would have covered in the syllabus. 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.

Section B

Question 1

The question was about the identity and the mission of Jesus, together on what the Church teaches about the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It was divided into three sections. For the first part of the question most candidates answered by saying that Jesus is the son of God who was sent to save mankind. Only few spoke of Jesus as Lord.

For the second part of the question, the most common titles attributed to Jesus were Messiah, Christ, Son of God, Lord and Rabbi. Most candidates gave a brief explanation of the three titles.

For the third part of the question regarding the mystery of incarnation a majority of students distinguished between the human and divine nature of Jesus without entering into the hypostatic union of these two natures.

Question 2

Question 2 focused on Genesis and the narrative of creation. The question was divided into 2 parts. In the first part, candidates were asked to identify the main points that bear theological weight in the narrative of creation as this is found in the Book of Genesis. It would have been better if attention was devoted to the main theological insights, such as (1) human beings created in the image of God, (2) equality between man and women and (3) the idea of stewardship. Furthermore, regrettably, few candidates deemed it important to bring in their presentation the idea of one's soul and its salvation.

In the second part, candidates were asked to outline how god's promise of salvation was open to all. There seems to be two things missing in candidates' answer to this part of the question. First, students seriously lack a sense of history. God's promise of salvation for all is not simply a proposition of religious belief (or abstract thinking), but that this happens in space and time. Secondly, candidates preferred to speak of God's love for humanity, while neglecting his gift of freedom to all.

Question 3

The third question dealt with the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the healing brought about by this Sacrament. The question was very common amongst candidates and most of them attempted it. For the first part, many only spoke of reconciliation with God. Reconciliation with the Church was lacking.

In the second part, where students were asked about the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a Sacrament of healing, many spoke of the spiritual healing of the sacrament of Reconciliation without entering much into the importance that Jesus gave to the spiritual healing.

For the third part of the question most candidates gave the five attributes one must have when entering confession.

The fourth and final part of the question proved to be more challenging to the students. Only few gave the correct answer. Many mixed up general confession with private confession. From the scripts, one can see that students gave all sorts of answers.

Question 4

This question was about the first commandment and the sins against the first commandment. A substantial number of the candidates were not able to identify the sins against the first commandment. Once again, there seems to be an emphasis on religious knowledge but less reference to the strict relationship between religion/faith and life. Furthermore, most candidates were imprecise on their understanding of worship and veneration.

Question 5:

Question 5 dealt with the theme of Christian prayer, covering the fourth and last part of the syllabus. The candidates were asked to define Christian prayer. The vast majority gave valid answers, most of whom mentioned that Christian prayer is a personal relationship with God and that we communicate with God through prayer. Only a few candidates gave the classic definition of prayer, which reads "prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God" (CCC 2590). The fact that prayer leads to salvation was totally missing.

The candidates were also requested to describe two instances when Jesus prayed. Most of the valid answers included the Crucifixion, the Gethsemane and the Our Father. Although these answers are correct, students did not elaborate on the description. Some answers only mentioned that Jesus prayed before performing miracles, without any reference to specific examples. Other answers were out of point because the focus was on the Mystery of the Incarnation, as students defined the two natures of Christ.

In the final part, students were asked to mention three forms of prayer. Many gave valid answers and explanations. Alas, some still confuse the forms of prayer with personal prayer. The correct answers included blessing and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. The following answers were out of point: vocal prayer, meditation, contemplative prayer and *lectio divina* or any part of it.

**Chairperson
Examination Panel 2014**