

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
SEC

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE
MAY 2015

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**SEC Religious Knowledge
May 2015 Session
Examiners' Report**

Part 1: STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Table 1 shows the distribution of grades for the May 2015 session of the examination.

| GRADE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | U | ABS | TOTAL |
|------------|-----|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-------|
| PAPER A | 106 | 440 | 592 | 478 | 282 | - | - | 233 | 24 | 2155 |
| PAPER B | - | - | - | 111 | 315 | 311 | 215 | 238 | 74 | 1264 |
| TOTAL | 106 | 440 | 592 | 589 | 597 | 311 | 215 | 471 | 98 | 3419 |
| % OF TOTAL | 3.1 | 12.9 | 17.3 | 17.2 | 17.5 | 9.1 | 6.3 | 13.8 | 2.9 | 100.0 |

Part 2: COMMENTS REGARDING CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE**PAPER 1**

Section A

General Remarks

This section included 25 questions that were within the syllabus framework. These questions tested the candidates on four strands of Religious Knowledge, i.e. the Religious Language, the Spiritual Dimension, the Word of God and the Personal Catholic Worldview. Both Paper A and B offered candidates the opportunity to assess themselves in the thematic study of Religion and their responses in the light of faith to fundamental questions of life. There was a noticeable difference between the level of Paper A and Paper B candidates. Many candidates sitting for Paper B showed insufficient knowledge about the subject. Two things seemed so clear. Some Candidates lacked analytic skills, while others possibly simply did not read the question properly. The general level of achievement was low.

Question 1

Most of the candidates answered (a) and (b) correctly. Only some did not answer.

Question 2

Some candidates found this question rather hard and only a relative minority managed to mention the five books. Some candidates did not read the question properly. Instead of naming the first five books of the Bible, their answer was about different books from both Testaments.

Question 3

Only half of the candidates answered the question correctly.

Question 4

A relative majority demonstrated a scarce understanding of the canon of the Holy Scripture in comparison to some others who gave a precise definition and reference to the Council of Trent and apocryphal books. Some, nevertheless, do not understand the role and function of the canon.

Question 5

Many candidates wrote about the rift from nature, from ourselves and from others. However, there were a considerable number of candidates who referred to consequences such as suffering, death, original sin, pain at childbirth, etc.

Question 6

Many spoke of forgiveness of sin. The promise of redemption or of the Saviour was mentioned by very few candidates.

Question 7

Most of the candidates answered it correctly and have a clear idea of what original sin is all about.

Question 8

Many answered it correctly by referring to the death of the firstborn. Others simply referred to other plagues.

Question 9

Most of the candidates sitting for Paper A and B did not know the answer. In fact, the Talmud featured quite frequently in the answers. The correct answers included Tacitus, Pliny or Suetonius and Josephus Flavius.

Question 10

This question did not ask the candidates to write down the notes or marks of the Church (One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic), but three expressions with which we refer to the Church, namely the new People of God, the family of God, and the Body of Christ or similar expressions.

Question 11

Most candidates sitting for Paper A answered this question correctly, but most candidates of Paper B gave all types of answers such as '12 as the months of the Year', '12 to have many people around him for help'.

Question 12

Some just mentioned "unity in the Church". Many others confused the term *collegiality* with some sort of school, college, institution, etc. Collegiality refers to relationship between bishops or that between the Pope and the bishops.

Question 13

There was a variety of answers, but the majority expressed the right answers. The most common were: teaching, baptising and healing.

Question 14

There were many good detailed answers, but quite a few confused the ecumenical movement with inter-religious initiatives.

Question 15

Many could understand that the question was referring to the moment when Jesus had to suffer – many said that he had to die on the cross – for us. The majority of the candidates from both papers got this one right.

Question 16

Less than half of the candidates found this question difficult to answer. While many of the candidates seem knowledgeable about what happens during consecration, they do not know that that moment in question is referred to as consecration. It refers to the change that happens from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Question 17

Most of Paper A candidates answered correctly. On the other hand, most of Paper B candidates gave various answers. Many candidates spoke of God resting after creation.

Question 18

Most candidates gave the right answer.

Question 19

It is truly worrying that a vast majority does not have a sound idea of the common good. Only a handful answered this correctly. Some candidates even stated that the common good refers to the basic needs of a person!

Question 20

Most candidates answered correctly. Many of the candidates knew that Jesus was speaking about money or material wealth and that there cannot be two masters at the same time.

Question 21

Although the answers were generally correct, most candidates confused the effects of Baptism with the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Others mentioned that the Holy Spirit gives people strength and help them to be true witnesses of Christ.

Question 22

The majority knew the right answer. Prayer means talking or communicating to God.

Question 23

There were very few incorrect answers.

Question 24

In general, there were many who answered this correctly. Most candidates answer the first part while leaving the second part unanswered. The candidates were asked to speak about the resurrection of the bodies at the end of time and about Christ who rose from the dead and so will all those who believe in him.

Question 25

This question asked candidates to define purgatory and heaven. Most candidates answered correctly. The first refers to the purification, which one needs to be in eternal friendship with God. The second refers to the perfect union / love with God.

Section B

General Remarks

In this section, the candidates had to assimilate their general Religious Knowledge and to translate it into meaningful reflection that makes sense for everyday living. The candidates performed fairly and marks varied a great deal. Overall, Paper A candidates answered most questions correctly with a high percentage of them obtaining more than 15 marks (out of 25). Paper B candidates answered in brief, without giving too much detail to explain the answer given. Questions 1 and 2 of Section B proved to be the most difficult.

Question 1

In this question, the candidates were asked to write about three documents of the Second Vatican Council. At least two things are noticeable. First, most candidates could identify three Vatican II documents, but only half of them could actually explain their content. Secondly, most of the candidates mixed up Vatican II documents with Encyclicals such as *Laborem exercens*, *Centesimus Annus* and *Rerum Novarum*. The most common documents which were mentioned are *Nostra Aetate* and candidates explained the theme correctly and clearly – that of the relation of the Church with non-Christian Religions. There were others who mentioned the *Gaudium et spes*.

Question 2

Most of the candidates from both papers wrote about the second quotation "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*" which seemed easier and forgot to write about the first one "*I am He who is*" or the connection between the two. Most of them knew who Jesus was talking to when he said "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*", but very few knew who said "*I am He who is*". Most answers indicate that the candidates responded only one part of the question. Besides, the candidates were asked to see the connection between the two phrases and to state that Jesus is God. It is equally important that the candidates distinguish between God as revealed in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ as the revealed of God in the New Testament.

Question 3

Most candidates of Paper A answered this correctly, while Paper B candidates found this question very difficult. Some have also misinterpreted the word 'overburdened' (understood simply in a literal sense) i.e., people tired after a whole day of work or people who are sick, etc. Having said that, there were many good answers from both papers. Many of the candidates connected Jesus' words to the reality of sin and that Jesus is humanity's only salvation. Nonetheless, few referred to sacrament of reconciliation. Some others connected this part with those who are sick and poor.

Question 4

Most candidates of Paper A and Paper B candidates answered this question by giving a list of the gifts and the virtues that the Holy Spirit gives to humanity. Many candidates wrote about the effects of Baptism as learnt in the Textbook, without however being specific to the question. Nonetheless, others referred to the Holy Spirit as the one who leads humanity to the truth, to grow up in faith and in the bond of love.

Question 5

This question was particularly well-addressed by most candidates. Many mentioned indissolubility, faithfulness and unity. Nonetheless, it is evident that some candidates mixed up the characteristics with the aims of marriage. Some others, in fact, mentioned qualities like respect, love, sincerity and honesty which are good, but not necessarily specific to a Christian marriage. There were also those candidates who tried to express the three qualities of a Christian marriage without mentioning them by name and trying to explain them in some other words. There were those who said that the couple has to be prepared so that they will take good care of the children brought forth by the bond of love between them.

Section C

General Remarks

Most answers were correct and to the point. This section proved to be easy to answer for both Paper A and B candidates. This section revolved around one's call to holiness and the Christian call to love. Candidates had to express their thoughts and feelings about people, objects and issues regarding the environment. Thus, attitudes are crucial in understanding the way people perceive the world around them, as they determine what a person will see, hear, think and do, thus making them central to life. In this context, attitude formation and change is an important part of identifying and explaining an individual's attitude to an object or issue.

This section offered interest and enthusiasm for the study of Religion and the relationship between faith and life. They had the occasion to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of Religion by exploring the impact of beliefs, teachings, practices, ways of life and forms of expressing meaning. They had the occasion to express their personal responses and informed insights on fundamental questions about identity, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments.

First Text

- a) Most of the answers were correct, but many candidates think that only Christians are called to holiness. Besides, the lay people are equally called to holiness, just as bishops, priests and religious.
- b) Many of the candidates found the answer from the text: *it is precisely in living with love and offering one's own Christian witness in everyday affairs that we are called to become saints*. Nonetheless, some showed a lack of understanding of it.
- c) The answer to this question should have been quite straightforward as it is written clearly in the text: *God gives you the grace to become holy*. But even in this one, a few managed to get it wrong. Others mistakenly answered 'the Holy Spirit' or 'the Apostles'.
- d) Unfortunately, some candidates do not realise that the answer could actually be found in the text: *every state of life leads to holiness, always! In your home, on the street, at work, at church, in that moment and in your state of life, the path to sainthood has been opened*.
- e) Most of the answers were correct, but many others mentioned "our lives" as the path the pope is referring to. There were many who did not answer the second part of the question.

Second Text

- a) [i] Most of the candidates understood that the reference is to the parable of the Good Samaritan, but some confuse the first two persons (the priest and the levite) who did not help the man in need. There were a handful of candidates who referred to other parables or to the story of Zaccheus the Tax Collector.
- [ii] Most of the answers referred to illegal immigrants or people of different skin colour. While it is laudable that the younger generation is aware of the deprived in society, few realise that these could also be the people closest to them, school-mates, peers, family members, and neighbours amongst others.
- b) For those who read and understood the text, the answer was very easy to find. However, it emerged that not many candidates understood what the word solidarity means. In this sense, some referred to ways of helping the people in need, but without showing the connection between love and solidarity.
- c) Many of the answers were just about how good and important voluntary work is. Candidates mentioned all type of voluntary work. Some of them were not given full marks due to the fact that they didn't mention that it is work not paid for. Some simply jotted down all they know about that word without any direct connection to the question.
- d) While most candidates are aware of the presence of various voluntary organizations in Malta, they seem to be unfamiliar to their activity. A good number of candidates named government organisations instead of Church ones.
- e) Most of Paper A candidates answered this question correctly. Some Paper B candidates were not awarded full marks because their answer was very brief. Most of the answers were explanations of good social skills.

Paper 2 A

General Remarks

The paper covered all the main areas of the syllabus, giving an opportunity to all candidates to show their knowledge of the subject. Although a higher level of Religious Knowledge and better essay-writing skills are desirable, most of the candidates were well prepared. Regrettably, the biggest factor in losing marks is irrelevance. Candidates should answer the question they choose, rather than go off at a tangent. The key for high-grade work is 'critical analysis', that is, arguments that lead up to an appropriate conclusion. Question 1 was the most chosen question. Questions 3 and 4 were the least answered in a correct manner.

Question 1

This concerned the value of religion for humanity. The majority commenced their work by answering this question.

- a) Most candidates answered in a sufficient manner regarding the meaning of existential questions such as 'who I am', 'where we are going', the theme of life and death. Many referred to the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Others also included Hinduism and Buddhism.
- b) Most candidates have a sound knowledge of what major religions say about the afterlife. Nonetheless, it must be said that while they seem familiar with non-Christian religions, namely Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, still there seems to be a confusion of their beliefs-systems.
- c) Most candidates emphasised the Church's role in encouraging respect for 'the other' and appreciating one's search for truth according to one's religion. Reference to Vatican Council II and its document *Nostra Aetate* were indeed appropriate. It should be clear though that in matters of life, religions may seem the same, but it is certainly different when it comes to doctrine.

Question 2:

This concerned the principle that work is for man and not man for work. Most questions are properly addressed, however, reference to the Catholic social teaching is seriously lacking. Some answered this question as their first preference.

- a) Most of the candidates answered the question correctly and mentioned three suitable purposes, including to earn a proper wage, to co-operate with the Creator, and to express one's talents.
- b) The second part of the question was also well answered and most candidates scored a high mark mentioning a variety of injustices. Some even referred to the immigrants who sometimes earn a smaller wage than the local citizen. Some linked injustices to suffering, hate and discrimination.
- c) Although most of the candidates answered this question correctly, some confused rights with duties. It would have been better had the candidates chosen to speak in equal manner about the rights and duties of workers. Various good examples were mentioned to explain both terms.

Question 3:

This concerned the Bible as the written Word of God.

a) Some answers were simply good, including references to *Dei Verbum*. Nonetheless, it appears that the candidates have sometimes a mistaken understanding of the term "inspiration". There was scarcely any biblical reference or a proper explanation of the Spirit's intervention on the human authors' writing abilities.

b) There were some very good answers, but not all answers were clear. Some candidates seemed to repeat what was written in the question. Nevertheless, many candidates acknowledged the fact that God does not make mistakes and is truthful to all. There were many who clearly understood that the Bible is not there to give us scientific solutions.

c) Most candidates gave the correct answer by referring to the Sea of Reeds. Nonetheless, there could have been a better explanation of the main message of the event of the crossing of the Reed Sea. Moreover, while some failed to answer the third part of the question, others rightly emphasised that God wills humanity's salvation and that he never leaves humanity unattended.

Question 4:

This concerned Mary as a model for our response to God.

a) Almost half of the candidates explained briefly what the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the Solemnity of Mary's Assumption into Heaven are, without explaining what these two dogmas mean to Christians.

b) The majority of the candidates expressed the answer in showing the true meaning of solidarity. Reference to various episodes in the life of Mary were referred to, namely Mary's visitation to Elizabeth and her presence at the wedding at Cana.

c) Most candidates answered the question well, however at times too briefly and without delving deeper in the subject. Some simply spoke of leading a good Christian life without however connecting their answer to what Mary did in her own life.

Question 5:

This concerned making peace with God and with each other through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

a) Most candidates were able to recall the two narratives and correctly answered the two episodes. Reference has been made to the stories concerning Zaccheus, the woman caught in adultery, the good thief, the Samaritan woman and the paralytic. Many failed to interpret some of Jesus' sayings, like "Go and sin no more".

b) Most of the candidates answered this correctly. Some were very good in giving a detailed description of what the examiner asked for. In this question, the candidates were required to think critically and objectively about the Sacrament of reconciliation.

c) The majority of candidates answered this question quite well, thus showing that Confession reunites us with God and makes us lead a happy life. While most spoke of reconciliation as re-union with God, with others, with ourselves and with nature, some failed to mention reconciliation with the Church and with ourselves.

Paper 2 B

General Comments

The paper covered adequately all the main areas of the syllabus. It emerges that the most favourite questions to be answered include those regarding themes from the Bible and others requiring answers of a practical nature. Nevertheless, it emerges that most candidates are not familiar enough with the suggested textbooks indicated in the syllabus or with any other source of religious formation. While some managed to present what they possibly recollected from their childhood lessons, their reflection is puerile, often emotional or plainly naive. The candidates' limited religious knowledge is apparent in the vast majority of the answers.

Question 1

Although the majority of the candidates replied correctly, only few wrote clear and well-explained answers. As a rule, one is expected to write a precise answer including an explanation for it. Some answers were out of focus for the following reasons: (1) providing supplementary, but unnecessary information, e.g. on Buddhism, when the question concerned Hinduism and Christianity; or information on the founders of religions, their practices and principles; (2) confusion between different beliefs; (3) giving partially correct answers e.g. re-incarnation is restricted to being reborn in the form of an animal.

Question 2

To this relatively simple, but fundamental question on the meaningfulness of the Bible for Christians, most candidates gave an inadequately general answer. Quite a good number of candidates mentioned valid points to show why the bible is the most important book for Christians: it is the Word of God, it is inspired, it is more than just a historical book, it reveals God's plan of salvation and it is equally a guide for living a good life. One was expected to share one's reflection on how Christians nourish themselves on Scripture or to explain how, for instance, the Word of God helps Christians to grow in love towards each other among other things. For such a question, the candidates were requested to give a direct answer.

Question 3

Most of the answers were acceptable, but lacking in depth. A relative minority defined God as the creator of the universe and whose providence maintains everything in existence. In general, candidates stated that God created everything as narrated in the book of Genesis. However, they failed to show how God alone is the Lord of all. Besides, candidates were not asked to narrate the story of the book of Genesis. Such a question revealed that several candidates found it hard to decide among conflicting theories, arguments and evidence, and so they found it difficult to provide a clear conclusion.

Question 4

A considerable number of candidates gave satisfactory answers. In one way or another, most narrated correctly the Exodus story. Many candidates explained, in good detail, how God used to take care of his chosen people. Many mentioned the crossing of the Reed Sea, God's providence of food for the People, the caring of God through the cloud during the day and the column of fire during the night, and above all, the fact that God had made a covenant with his chosen people that He will be their God and they will be his People.

Question 5

This question required the candidates to understand that Christian teaching implies both 'believing' and 'reasoning' the contents of the faith. The intellectual challenge put forward by a university professor to his candidates, in line with the story, regarding the resurrection of Jesus from death, asked for a convincing argumentation of the Christian faith. The aim of this question was to apply the knowledge one has learnt to strengthen one's argument, in this case on Christ's Resurrection.

Question 6

This was one of the preferred questions to be answered. Although many candidates are aware of the Church's commitment for the poor and that a lot is being done, some others have included sweeping statements that actually reveal their hostility to the Church and its mission in the world. This was not an easy question, but it challenged the candidates to suggest how the Church could be more relevant in today's world. Areas that the church should constantly focus, according to most answers, include the youth sector and with those in need.

Question 7

Most candidates were able to explain the meaning of reconciliation with God and the need for confession. The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings joy because it unites Christians with God and with each other. Moreover, it removes sins by helping Christians to start a new life. Some candidates explained reconciliation in terms of friendship with God. While some candidates explained the process by which one should prepare oneself for penance, the importance of receiving the sacrament was not clarified. A relative minority demonstrated a lack of understanding of the term 'forgiveness'.

Question 8

Most of the candidates answered incorrectly and were not able to see the link between the Last Supper of Jesus and the Mass. The most common answers included the idea of a gathering, which Jesus intended for his disciples to meet and celebrate the Eucharist together as well as reference to the same words said during the last supper and by the priest during the mass. Others mentioned the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ and the mass as a re-enactment of what has happened at the Last Supper. Very few mentioned the command to "do this in memory of me."

Question 9

Most of the candidates gave good answers. Many wrote about the story of the Good Samaritan and concluded that one should do the same by helping those in need. Some simply did not see an evident link between them. In such manner, the word 'solidarity' could be explained only through an example. It has to be remarked that solidarity is far more than raising money for those in need or one's good heart to help others. Those who answered this question showed that they are aware that we need to be aware of each other's needs, just as the Good Samaritan. Some mixed up the parable of the Good Samaritan with the story of Saint Martin.

Question 10

Most of the candidates gave very brief and vague answers. Although many referred to the sacrament of baptism, very few could explain the dignity of being a Christian. A good number of candidates answered that people became children of God by baptism, but they did not explained what 'heirs' and 'co-heirs' mean. An absolute majority answered correctly the first part, but many of them failed to give a correct answer to the last two questions. Inheritance of the kingdom proved to be a difficult concept for the candidates. Only a handful mentioned the kingdom of God, heaven or eternal life.

Question 11

The candidates seemed to be aware that there are many evil roots in our society. Most candidates opted to give an explanation for each and every wrongdoing including theft, retaliatory action, envy and fanaticism. Only a few gave a correct explanation of how Christians can destroy these things by putting God in the centre of life and by following the teachings of Jesus. While, in a way, this question tested the imagination of the candidates, many preferred to write about 'love' and 'forgiveness' as a means to overcome the mentioned aspects of hatred. Christian love is then the true way of building a solid foundation for relationships amongst everyone.

Question 12

This question concerned the relationship of God with humanity before its fall. The candidates were asked to share their understanding of God's relationship with humanity, the reality of sin and the meaning of work. By referring to practical life situations, many candidates demonstrated their ability to relate sin, suffering and work. Nonetheless, others simply argue about a just wage and the reality of suffering. Furthermore, one is mistaken in saying that work is nothing less than a punishment. On a positive note, there were some laudable references to the challenging realities of sickness and death, the development of one's talents, and the relationship between work and faith.

Question 13

Most candidates answered this question sufficiently well. This was definitely a favourite question. Candidates seem to understand the meaning of everyday life and mutual self-giving between partners in marriage. Many mentioned practical examples to explain that true love should not be associated with a particular day, but has to be lived and shown all year round. Most of the candidates answered this correctly. Reference to terms like *eros*, *philia* and *agape* revealed that most candidates are familiar to the Christian understanding of love. The idea of life-commitment was less frequently referred to.

Question 14

In this question, the candidates were asked to write about the Christian life in view of the last things. Most candidates understood the need to choose what is morally right and avoid what is morally wrong. They have rightly explained the difference between the particular and the universal judgement, the role of conscience in the life of the Christian, the struggling towards an eternal friendship with God, as well as the choice of living a good life because acts determine the future. While some explained at length some good and bad choices, they have failed to refer to God and the final judgement.

**Chairperson,
Examiners' Panel 2015**