



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE B
GCSE
COMPONENTS 1 AND 2**

SUMMER 2023

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE B

GCSE

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 1: FOUNDATIONAL CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

General Comments

This report should be read in conjunction with the mark scheme which contains the assessment criteria and indicative content for each question.

Most of the candidates performed well on the exam paper with only a few blank responses. The paper had a good balance of difficulty, with all questions being appropriate for each marking band. The paper differentiated well with all questions accessible. Overall, the candidates had a good understanding of the paper's structure, the questions asked, and the specification content.

Based on the exam papers, it was evident that the candidates were familiar with the assessment criteria and could effectively apply the necessary skills to attempt each question. Several candidates highlighted the essential keywords to help concentrate on the question's demands. Many candidates used planning tools such as mind maps, diagrams, and acronyms, but needed to manage their time well to complete all the questions within the given timeframe. Some candidates appear to struggle with timing in general, answering the paper well but in too much detail for some questions such as a(s) and b(s), and then running out of time, missing the last one or two questions which might have gained them marks.

In this specification, it is important to use appropriate religious or specialist language. Certain candidates demonstrated confidence in using religious, philosophical, and ethical terminology to convey their arguments. However, as in previous years, some responses lacked reference to sources of wisdom and authority, despite utilizing key concepts from the specification. Candidates are expected to refer to sacred texts and other sources of wisdom and authority, such as artefacts, where appropriate. However, the form of reference is not dictated and it is more important that the source is used in the context of the demands of the question and developed in the context of the question. Selecting a few appropriate references to reinforce the explanation or evaluation would gain more credit than the approach of listing sources of wisdom with no further unpacking or contextualisation. Some candidates are still placing quotation marks around a statement of their own in the hope of gaining credit for a source of wisdom. No credit is given for this. It was, however, pleasing to see that some candidates were aware of different interpretations of some sources. This was particularly apparent in (d) questions when candidates discussed the validity of interpretations of different sources of wisdom. Many candidates were able to show an understanding of different opinions and beliefs within different religious traditions and were able to correctly identify different denominations within Christianity and specify differences in beliefs and practices. However, there were still some misconceptions regarding the beliefs within Christianity. Responses generally showed a developing maturity in analytical skills with a good range of judgment used throughout the extended writing, but this need to be a continued focus for schools.

Candidates must remember to indicate at the end of the first section if they are continuing their answer on the additional writing pages, and clearly state the number of the question(s) e.g. 1d. 2c. Candidates must also avoid writing on pages that clearly state 'Do Not Write on This Page'.

The demands of each type of question are distinct and it is appropriate to consider candidate performance in each type of question before scrutinising responses to individual questions.

(a) Questions – Candidates are required to give a definition of one of the key concepts. These questions are always based on the key concepts. Many candidates' responses were the definitions from the Eduqas Key Concepts document. However, many successful candidates wrote their own valid responses from their understanding in their own words. Either approach is acceptable and the majority of responses gained credit. Often candidates supported their definition with an example which, as indicated in the mark scheme, gains some credit but is not required. In addition to answering an (a) question, the use of key concepts can be credited, where used appropriately, as part of the criteria for (b), (c) and (d) questions which require the use of 'religious/specialist' terms, and a good understanding of these terms supports all responses.

(b) Questions – These questions require candidates to select and describe relevant information using specific religious language in response to the question. There is no necessity for any form of explanation or evaluation. Candidates are expected to refer to a source of wisdom and authority, where relevant. Candidates need to read the question carefully to respond to the demands of the question, e.g. if the question requires 'beliefs' more than one would be required, but two described well are enough to meet the requirement of the question.

(c) Questions – These questions require candidates to demonstrate an understanding of an area of specification content from Catholic and from other Christian traditions or Jewish perspectives. Candidates structured these answers in a variety of ways. In Component 1, some candidates lost marks as they only wrote about one religious tradition, where two are required. An important point is that no credit is awarded for references to Humanism and other non-religious traditions in responses for these (c) questions. This was less evident this year, but some candidates were still including completely irrelevant non-religious beliefs. Many responses included a clear structure of a paragraph on each of the two traditions they had studied, the first sentence making clear the tradition they were addressing, and then writing a relevant explanation under each heading, with good use of religious language and sources of wisdom and authority. This approach usually resulted in focused answers which met the rubric demands. Some candidates debated between the two traditions, which is not a requirement of the question and so wasted time and were sometimes confused in their responses. In a few responses, the two traditions were not identified, resulting in difficulty in being certain which traditions were being referred to. It is recognised within the marking criteria that there will sometimes be overlap between beliefs regarding certain issues and that a response will be judged upon the evidence and explanation presented, including the specific religious language and interpretation of sources of authority.

(d) Questions – The different demands of this type of question require an extended piece of writing, and many were well prepared for the focus of the question, enabling them to access the higher marking bands. Many candidates used planning tools to enable clear preparation for responses, but care must be taken regarding the timing and length of responses in order to complete the paper. Although candidates were well prepared, the response requires a quality of argument that incorporates the selection of relevant evidence rather than listing and describing everything they know that links to the question. It is the argument and evaluative discussion which makes this question different from the demands of a (c) question. Candidates are expected to select evidence to reinforce and exemplify their arguments. This is a very different skill from just explaining a belief or teaching. Sometimes it appeared that responses contained too much information but little development into an evaluative discussion. Some candidates explained the views of three different perspectives in successive paragraphs which often limited responses to an explanation rather than an analysis of arguments. Some responses included analysis and judgment although some were underdeveloped. Some stronger responses began each paragraph with a connective in response to the previous paragraph, which over-all worked well. Although there is not a right or wrong way to approach this, it should be noted that in some responses the phrase, ‘This a strong /weak argument’ was stated, but the justification was underdeveloped or did not apply to the content cited, or lacked focus on the demands of the question. Alternatively, some candidates used a concluding paragraph at the end of the response but for some this was a repeat of what had already been said or, “because I said so in my first/second paragraph” and so adding nothing to the response.

Many showed an understanding of different religious and non-religious beliefs which contributed to the debate within the response. However, some still based their arguments on the weak reasoning that non-religious believers do or don’t do something, because they don’t believe in God, without focusing on the requirements of the question. Sweeping statements should be avoided and recognition of different non-religious views could be developed, as opposed to all being referred to as ‘Humanist’.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) (i) What do Catholics mean by ‘transcendence’? (2)

Many candidates knew the key concepts this year, using the official Eduqas definitions for the answer, but there were many candidates who wrote their own wording and that was still accurate, thereby gaining full marks.

(ii) What do Catholics mean by ‘revelation’? (2)

This was generally answered correctly, but some candidates lost focus on the question by just repeating the term in their response.

(b) (i) Describe Catholic teachings about peace. (5)

Most students attempted this question, but many lacked references to sources of wisdom and authority. However, there was a pleasing number who made reference to the work of CAFOD, making the link that poverty and injustice can lead to conflict.

(ii) Describe how Catholics interpret the creation accounts in Genesis. (5)

Candidates demonstrated clear knowledge of Catholic teachings and the accepted theories of Evolution/The Big Bang. Some had not read the question carefully and made reference to other denominations. Care must also be taken as there were some general references to Orthodox/Reform Catholics that were not relevant to the question.

(c) (i) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, teachings about preserving the environment. (8)

This was generally well answered, with the only common cause of marks being lost being a failure to remember that two different perspectives needed to be explained. Many candidates made reference to sources of wisdom and authority and made good use of the teachings in *Laudato Si'*. Some candidates were able to explain Jewish teachings, but these were generally very brief. Some candidates included a Humanist view which did not gain them any marks because of the very clear directive of the question.

(ii) Explain from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, views about the value of human life. (8)

This question was mainly well-answered, but some responses were too long and repetitive, which might have impacted timing further into the paper. Some candidates forgot the demands of the question and wrote two paragraphs explaining the Catholic perspective only. There was a risk of candidates making links to abortion which can be credit-worthy, but some then lost the focus of the question.

(d) 'Only science can explain creation' (15)

This question was well answered in general, but some focused on knowledge and understanding, reflecting the demands of a (c) question, and did not address the demands of an evaluation question. Evolution and the Big Bang were used well as examples in the unpicking and evaluation of the Catholic perspective. The majority of candidates included a non-religious perspective as demanded by the question.

Q.2 (a) What do Catholics mean by 'free will'? (2)

A well-answered question, many using the specification definition to respond. An example was not required to be awarded two marks.

(b) Describe Catholic beliefs about Original Sin. (5)

Many students knew this concept, making reference to 'The Fall' and Adam and Eve and some developed their response by linking to Baptism. Some did not focus on the demands of the question by describing sin in a very general way.

(c) Explain, from either Catholic Christianity and Judaism or two Christian traditions, ways of understanding pilgrimage. (8)

Some candidates failed to respond to the demands of this explanation question by only describing a pilgrimage to Lourdes or by only including a Catholic perspective, far fewer knew about pilgrimage in Judaism. The comparison document on the Eduqas website is a useful resource for teachers.

(d) (i) 'If God was all-loving he would not allow suffering.' (15)

Many candidates answered this question well, with evidence of evaluation, using religious belief and, although it isn't required for this question, non-religious views, successfully. There were clear references to the Bible, the CCC, and Salvifici Doloris, making use of the demands of the specification. However, some candidates lost focus on the question and there was confusion regarding the Inconsistent Triad and relating it to the question. Some candidates focused on an explanation between natural and moral evil, lacking evaluation and analysis of different viewpoints.

(ii) 'Praying the Rosary is the most important practice for Catholics.' (15)

Some candidates found this to be a trickier question, straying into a description of the Rosary and the sorrowful mysteries. The best responses explored the question of the most important practice, comparing it to others, for example pilgrimage or going to Mass. Some candidates attempted a non-religious perspective which could be credited, but many did not address the requirements of the question i.e. '...for Catholics'

Summary of key points

- Many (d) type responses are showing greater depth of evaluation than previous years but the need to substantiate these judgments with religious and ethical evidence is still an area for development.

- A number of responses suffered from limited time to develop answers fully. Completing the (d) questions first is could a way of some candidates managing their time better.
- The structure for responding to (c) type questions still need further consideration for candidates to express all they know and understand about two different traditions and not limiting the response to one tradition.
- Key concept questions are generally answered well, but specialist language should be embedded in response to (b) (c), and (d) questions as well.
- Development of a wider, more robust understanding of different non-religious views would benefit the 1(d) question that demands it, but they still need to be avoided in all other types of questions.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE B

GCSE

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 2: APPLIED CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

General Comments

The general comments on this component do not differ significantly from the comments on Component 1. For the important, generic comments on the different question types please see the Principal Examiner's report for Component 1: Foundational Catholic Theology. The generic comments on question types apply equally to both Components, except that the (c) questions of Component 2 do not require two religious perspectives and question 1(d) does not require non-religious perspectives (though these would be credited where they are relevant).

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) What do Catholics mean by 'resurrection'? (2)

Many candidates had learned the specification definitions for the key concepts and used this precisely, and when their own definitions were used they were generally still worth 2 marks. Some candidates did not attempt this question.

(b) Describe two of the key documents of the Second Vatican Council. (5)

Some candidates did not attempt this question. Most candidates who responded had taken note of the requirement of the question to describe more than one and had clearly learned the ones stated in the specification. The main misconception was a description of *Laudato S'i* being cited as a Second Vatican Council document.

(c) (i) Explain the importance of the Lord's prayer for Catholics. (8)

Most candidates answered this question and the high band descriptors were accessed with good use of sources of wisdom and authority, along with an explanation of the influence of this prayer today. Some responses were limited as they focused on a description of the Lord's Prayer. (c) questions clearly demand an explanation and the candidates need to focus on the 'why'. Often, use of the word 'because' can encourage an explanatory response.

(d) 'Death is not the end.' (15)

Many candidates answered this question well, with some evidence of evaluation, using religious belief and (although it isn't required for this question), non-religious views successfully. There was evidence of a variety of Sources of Wisdom and Authority, including the Gospels, Corinthians, and funeral music and prayers. As with other (d) responses, candidates need to continue to focus on evaluation and judgment in order to access the higher band descriptors.

(d) 'Assisted suicide should never be allowed.' (15)

This question was well answered in general, with good use of sources of wisdom and authority, and influence of belief on practice. Links were made to euthanasia and the importance of palliative care, with a few straying into the abortion debate and so losing focus on the demands of the question. Development of evaluation skills was seen with the response from a non-religious perspective, but care needs to be taken not to use the simplistic 'because they don't believe in God' argument by itself without further analysis.

Q.2 (a) What do Catholics mean by 'absolutism'? (2)

This was the (a) response with the highest rate of candidates not attempting the question. However, for those who did, many used their own correct definition to gain full marks.

(a) (ii) What do Catholics mean by 'punishment'? (2)

This was generally answered correctly, with good use of examples, although this is not necessary for full marks.

(b) Describe Mary as a model of the Church. (5)

Many candidates attempted this, but many focused on just her role as the mother of Jesus and lost the focus of the question, Mary as the model of the Church. Those accessing the top band had focused on two aspects e.g. as the perfect disciple, an example of faith, commitment, and loyalty, and the belief that she intercedes for Catholics.

(b) (ii) Describe the difference between crime and sin. (5)

Many candidates responded well to this question, defining crime with an example, then describing how this is different to sin, using examples linked to a source of wisdom and authority, often one of the Ten Commandments, and its relevance in today's world.

(c) Explain Catholic teachings about forgiveness. (8)

This was generally answered well, using a range of sources of wisdom and authority to access Bands 3 and 4, and some responses were developed with the use of examples in today's world, e.g. Gee Walker. Candidates need to continue to focus on the why and use 'because' in (c) questions in order to differentiate from (b) describe questions and avoid just listing different sources of wisdom and authority.

(c) (ii) Explain the importance of redemption for Catholics. (8)

There were some candidates who did not attempt this question, highlighting the importance of making sure there is full specification coverage across the GCSE. Some candidates focused on a non-religious response, looking at the redemption of prisoners for rehabilitation, which did not respond to the question or they confused 'redemption' with 'repentance'. There were examples of excellent responses that examined the importance of redemption being the belief that Jesus paid a ransom (atonement) to free humans from sin by his sacrifice.

(d) (i) 'The Church is nothing more than a building.' (15)

This question was generally answered well, with very few not attempting the question, and so enabling candidates across abilities to be able to access the question, it was pleasing to see the range of different approaches. A range of sources of wisdom and authority could be used successfully, including the features of a church that reflect salvation, making it more special and significant than 'just a building' and many candidates used this approach. However, care must be taken as with all d questions, some responses focused on a list and explanation of the different features and lacked evaluation and judgment of arguments. Many candidates took a different approach debating the difference between 'church' and 'Church' (with a small 'c') as just a building and the Church as a unity of people. Many candidates developed their responses with reference to the four marks of the Church and the Church as the body of Christ, so debating that this 'Church' is much more than just a building. Non-religious approaches could be credited because the wording of the statement was open enough to allow this, and often included the debate around the historical and cultural importance of some buildings making them more important than other buildings, along with an evaluation of the religious perspective.

Summary of key points

- Ensure full coverage of the specification when planning teaching across the GCSE, in order for candidates to be able to access every question.
- Development of a wider understanding of the different non-religious views would benefit the 1(d) question, but still need to be avoided in all other types of questions.
- Candidates need to avoid just describing or just listing sources of wisdom and authority in (c) responses. They need to think about 'why' and 'because' to access higher marks.
- Candidates must remember to clearly state the number of the question(s) they are continuing to answer on any additional writing pages they use, e.g., 1d. 2c,
- Evaluation responses should address the issue of the quality of arguments to support a viewpoint and not just be an extended description or explanation.



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