



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

RELIGIOUS STUDIES ROUTE B GCSE

SUMMER 2019

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCSE

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 1: FOUNDATIONAL CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

General Comments

In this second year of this qualification's existence, candidates across the full ability range have really risen to the challenge of this more demanding GCSE. The evaluation questions especially are now being answered much better than they were even a year ago. It is clearly a skill that schools have focused on and students have evidently benefited. The paper was clearly accessible and allowed a full range of marks for all questions across all ability ranges.

As with last year's papers, some candidates clearly found some questions more challenging than others (this will be explored below) but overall there were far fewer instances of candidates not attempting questions. When candidates did struggle it was often because they had not read the question carefully enough or their answers did not focus on the specificity of the question. Equally, there were still some topics where they clearly had not been prepared well enough for the specificity of the question, particularly those that were dealing with topics or concepts that were introduced with this reformed GCSE.

The best responses demonstrated that candidates had really understood the connecting theme for each of the parts of the specification and the ability of candidates to think synoptically improved their responses immeasurably.

For part a) questions, candidates need to remember that the question specifically asks what Catholics understood the meaning of each of these key words to be. Phrasing the question this way is meant to highlight that the words whose definitions are sought in these questions often have very precise meanings in this context. Some of these words have generic meanings outside of the context of Catholic theology (such as the word "inspiration" for example) but the generic definition often does not gain any credit. Remember there is a glossary published by the board where the precise meanings of the key vocabulary are given.

Part b) questions were mainly well answered. Candidates only failed to gain full credit when they clearly did not understand the question being asked, or where they did not focus on the specificity of the question. For full marks on a part b) question candidates needed to include reference to a source.

Part c) questions for this component are always comparison questions, where the candidates are required to give a response that either compares two different Christian denominations or compares Catholicism with Judaism. It should be remembered that a comparison question like this can be asked about any part of the specification. However, it is also equally clear that there are some areas where the comparison is more legitimate, allowing for both kinds of comparison allowed by the question structure. Eduqas has recently published a resource that picks out numerous topics where there is legitimate diversity both within Christianity and between Catholicism and Judaism. Candidates need to be careful to include both points of the comparison in equal depth. When marks are lost on these questions it is often because they have only written about one half of the comparison. Also please remember that comparisons with non-religious worldviews cannot be credited in answer to these questions.

As with part c) questions, part d) questions can be asked about any part of the specification. It is worth preparing candidates to be ready for any evaluation questions by training them to think on their feet, using the knowledge they have gained from other parts of the specification, to answer any evaluation questions that they are faced with. The best responses to these kinds of question showed a coherent line of argument from beginning to end, where the judgement was clearly supported by the arguments considered. More students were using evaluative language this year, but the evaluation was still weak. Simply writing “this is a strong/weak argument because...” is not sufficient. The candidates’ ability to be able to successfully identify what makes arguments stronger or weaker is what makes the difference between a mediocre response and an excellent one. Equally, candidates were missing out on full marks if their evaluations lacked coherence. If a candidate evaluates arguments as all being strong – even when these arguments are on opposite sides – and then presents a judgement that takes a side, this affects the coherence of the argument because it is not clear why they have taken the side that they have in presenting their judgement. Remember also that the “Origins and Meaning” question must contain a non-religious point of view in the answer in order to access the full range of marks.

In terms of SPAG, candidates are coping very well in terms of spelling and the spelling has improved this year, even with the more demanding vocabulary. There were some commonly misspelled words, for example: atheist, belief/believe and environment. However, while spelling has improved in general, punctuation and grammar are more often weak. Common errors include capitalisation, using the word “of” where the word “have” ought to be used (for example, in phrases like ‘could have’ and ‘would have’), failure to distinguish between ‘there’, ‘their’ and ‘they’re’, and frequent apostrophe errors. It is worth all students revisiting the rules for apostrophes.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a) (i)** The definition of “inspiration” in the specification is very precise: it is concerned with the way Scripture came to be written and refers to the belief that the writers of the scriptures were guided by God in what they wrote. This question was one where generic responses most often led to responses that were not credit-worthy. Another error was presuming that the “God-breathed” part of the definition referred to God’s breathing life into Adam, which it does not.
- (ii)** This answer was invariably correctly answered, probably because the word “transcendence” really only has a theological meaning so there was no generic definition to distract candidates.
- (b) (i)** The best responses referred directly to the writings of St Augustine and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Some candidates mistakenly wrote that St Augustine believed in the Big Bang and Evolution, anachronistically conflating current Catholic thinking on creation. However, most students answered this question very well. Some students referred to other writings of St Augustine on original sin or the origin of evil that were not relevant to this question.
- (ii)** This question caused many candidates to stumble, partly because they often wanted to provide more complex responses than the question demanded. What the question demanded was a description of two activities Cafod engages in because of their commitment to human dignity.

Too often candidates gave responses that explored the concept of human dignity and the source of this concept, rather than describing Cafod's activity.

- (c)** **(i)** This question on abortion was clearly a popular question and the most frequent error was candidates spending too long answering it. It was very well answered, with the only common cause of marks being lost being a failure to remember that two different perspectives needed to be explained. Also, in some instances, candidates answered this question as if was an evaluation question, rather than an explanation question. This did not necessarily impact negatively on their mark but it did mean they often spent less time on the explanatory portion of the response that was worth the credit.

It is also worth noting that some candidates misunderstand the Catholic perspective. It is not the case that the Church allows abortion in the case of rape or when the unborn child has a disability. The scope of the doctrine of double effect is very precise and definitely does not extend to cases beyond instances of when the mother's life is immediately threatened by the pregnancy, such as ectopic pregnancy for example.

- (ii)** This question was mainly well-answered. However, it was more difficult for candidates to make meaningful distinctions due to the fact that different Christian denominations and Judaism are all committed to caring for the environment. The best answers were able to pick out the different reasons for this and the different impacts this had on behaviour.

- (d)** This question was very well answered as a rule. Some responses were weakened by focusing on creation in general rather than on the origins of human beings specifically.

Q.2 **(a)** A well-answered question. Again, the word 'incarnation' only has a theological meaning so candidates were rarely wrongfooted by a distracting generic definition, However, some of them did mistake 'incarnation' and 'reincarnation'.

- (b)** This question really divided the field and candidates usually either gained no marks or they gained full marks. Clearly many candidates did not know what the sorrowful mysteries were and so either did not attempt the question or their answer was about the beads and the prayers rather than the mysteries.

- (c)** This was a very well answered question. Candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of the Trinity (with the usual sprinkling of heresies thrown in!) and of the Jewish commitment to monotheism. Source references here were frequently very strong, with candidates using both the Nicene creed and the Shema very effectively.

- (d)** **(i)** This question was actually attempting to examine the part of the specification that related to suffering as effective in the formation of virtue. Most candidates did not approach the question in this way but read it as a problem of evil question.

The full range of marks was available for answers that did this, if the response sufficiently focused on those theodicies that speak of suffering as being formative of character.

- (ii) This was a trickier question for candidates. The best responses explored the question in the context of the authority of scripture and of the historical impact of the life and teaching of Jesus, rather than just noting the difference between theists and atheists in this regard. Some candidates took it as a question about Jesus' goodness, rather than a question about his divinity. The full range of marks was still available given that this could count as a legitimate reading of the question.

It is also worth noting that when a Jewish perspective was included it was often incorrect. Jews do not view Jesus as a prophet. Reference to the Messiah were usually looking at Judaism through a Christian lens. As a rule, references to Judaism in this question were unhelpful.

Summary of key points

- Read the question and ensure candidates focus of the specific demands of the question.
- Remember the importance of referencing sources.
- Draw on knowledge from across the specification – especially when responding to unexpected d) part questions
- Focus on helping candidates write coherent lines of argument that lead to justified conclusions: help them to write evaluatively, not just to use evaluative language.

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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.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1**
- (a)** This question was usually answered well. The word 'soul' only really has a theological meaning, so candidates were not distracted by generic alternative definitions. However, some of them missed out on full marks by only describing what the soul does (live on after death) and not what it is (the eternal part of a person).
 - (b)** This question was the one question across both papers that was most often misunderstood. The Catholic teaching on 'dying well' specifically relates to Catholic teaching about dignity in death and the alternatives to euthanasia for those who are dying as a consequence of debilitating illnesses. There were many generic responses to this question and an equally large number that treated this as a question about life after death. In both cases access to the full range of marks was limited.
 - (c)** This question was answered surprisingly well, with candidates often knowing a high level of detail about the four constitutions and the impact this had on Catholic practice following the council. Some candidates presented a view of the council that was far more radical than is justified. The council did not, for example, lead to the ordination of women. Equally, they credited it with things that had been features of reform much earlier in the Church's life. The council did not lead to translations of the Bible into English. Catholics had access to Catholic translations in English well before the council, though greater engagement with the Bible was indeed a consequence of it. Full marks were only available for answers that were more than just descriptions – connections between the council and its impact on practice were needed in order to make responses explanatory.
 - (d)**
 - (i)** This question was pointing candidates towards the debates surrounding euthanasia and abortion and the significance of sanctity of life arguments in this context. Some candidates attempted generic responses about living life to the full. These were rarely successful. However, on the whole responses to this question were very good.

- (ii) This was a deceptively tricky question. It was expected that candidates would find this a straightforward question to answer but too many responses stayed at the level of describing the different beliefs Catholics hold about heaven, hell and purgatory without going into the sources and evidence that would open up the evaluative heart of this question. Still, many candidates did answer it well.
- Q.2 (a)**
- (i) This is a case where the generic meaning of the word and the theological meaning is identical. The only tricky thing was defining 'forgiveness' without repeating the word.
- (ii) Most candidates answered this correctly, once again aided by the fact that word has no meaning outside of its theological context.
- (b)**
- (i) This was a really interesting question. When the question was written, the teaching of the Church was that capital punishment was allowed in cases where it is the only means of protecting society from an aggressor, but that other means should be found, if possible. This was the teaching in the Catechism at the time. By the time candidates came to sit the examination this teaching had been modified. The entry in the Catechism now states:
- "2267. Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good.
- Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption.
- Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide."
- Candidates who gave either response (that it is sometimes admissible and that it is never admissible) had access to the full range of marks.
- (ii) Many candidates performed well on this question because they recognised that the texts they had studied in this unit all come from Matthew's Gospel. They were sometimes tripped up when they referred to teachings of Jesus from other Gospels. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the parable of the prodigal son and Jesus forgiving his executioners from the cross are from Luke's Gospel, not Matthew's and were therefore not creditworthy.
- (c)**
- (i) This question was answered well on the whole. Candidates were sometimes misled by speaking about the resurrection without reference to the death of Jesus and this limited the marks available to them.

It is important again to stress that c) questions need to be explanatory and not just descriptive. They needed to say why Jesus' death is important, not just describe what Catholics believe about it.

- (ii) When this question was well-answered it focused on the attribute of Mary that make her an exemplar for Catholics and a model for faithful discipleship as a member of the Church. Weaker responses focused on the way Mary features as part of the prayer lives of Catholics.

- (d) This proved to be a trickier evaluation question than many of the others. It focused candidates on the difference between absolutist and relativist moralities. Many candidates knew the difference but could not always find arguments for one side or the other. The best responses focused on the importance of some moral rules being absolute in order to protect the vulnerable while being able to give examples of why flexibility in other cases better served morality. It was harder for candidates to find sources here on which to draw but creative candidates recognised how useful the Sermon on the Mount was for this question and made excellent use of it.

Summary of key points

- For c) part questions remember to explain, not just describe. Use the word “because” in your answer.
- The teaching of the Catholic Church on capital punishment has changed. See the revised paragraph 2267.
- When sources are given in the specification, it is useful to know where they are from, even if chapter and verse is not relevant (this would have helped a great deal with the Matthew's Gospel question.)

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COMPONENT 3: JUDAISM

General Comments

This was the second year of this specification. The report should be read in conjunction with the mark scheme which contains the assessment criteria and indicative content for each question. It was pleasing to see candidate's engagement with the paper and the skilful way that many candidates are using their knowledge and understanding to answer the questions. There was an increased evidence of candidates responding to the 'd' questions with greater confidence and certainty. It was particularly pleasing to see fewer references to Christianity and attempts to compare and contrast beliefs between Christianity and Judaism in 'd' questions.

Nowhere in the paper are candidates required to make any reference to or comparisons with any religious or non-religious traditions other than Judaism.

Reflecting last year's observations, most candidates recognise the diversity of Jewish beliefs and practices. This year there was evidence of more informed references to main differences between Orthodox and Reform traditions. There was also more evidence this year of candidates recognising that there are differences within the Orthodox and Reform tradition and of other branches of Judaism, such as secular Judaism.

It was pleasing to note that most responses demonstrated an engagement and genuine interest with many of the issues of the specification. Many candidates expressed a sophisticated understanding of key beliefs of Judaism, especially pikuach nefesh and mitzvot. It was evident from the responses to 'd' questions that candidates had a good understanding of the specification and many readily and insightfully used a range of evidence to justify their evaluative discussions as identified later in the report.

Many responses incorporated effective use of sources of authority. References were made to Maimonides; the beth din; role of rabbis; the Torah and Talmud with many candidates able to qualify their responses with references to different interpretations of the Torah and Talmud.

Demands of Questions

As a reflection of last year's report, it is appropriate to consider candidate performance in each type of question before scrutinising responses to individual questions:

(a) Questions – These questions are always based on the key concepts for each unit. Candidates are required to give a definition of one of the key concepts for the unit. Generally, these were answered well. Many candidates had appeared to have learnt a set definition while some wrote from their own understanding in their own words. Either are acceptable. Often candidates supported their definition with an example. It is important to remember that in addition to answering 'a' questions 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. This cross transference of knowledge was not always evident in candidates' responses.

(b) Questions – These questions require candidates to select and then describe relevant information using specific religious language to respond to the question. For some candidates the length of their responses was in excess of the amount of marks awarded and this occasionally impacted on candidates being able to give ‘d’ questions the amount of time warranted and the ability to finish the paper. Candidates are expected to refer to a source of authority, where relevant. References to sources of authority do not need to be confined to sacred texts. Relevant sources of authority could include references to God; the Torah; beth din; rabbis; Talmud; Maimonides; the prophets; conscience; family; the Haggadah etc.

(c) Questions – These questions require an explanation of a specific issue or concept important in Judaism. Within the explanation candidates are expected to use a range of appropriate specialist language including relevant key concepts and appropriate sources of authority. Candidates are not expected to make any judgements or evaluations but are expected to be able to explain rather than just describe.

(d) Questions – These questions require an extended piece of writing and carry half the marks for each of the unit. It was pleasing to see that many of the candidates were aware that the response requires a quality of argument which incorporates selection of relevant evidence rather than an opportunity to ‘describe all you know.’ Many different structures were being used to support candidates answers and there was evidence of planning, including the use of mind-maps, in preparation for the responses. It is important that if a formulaic structure is used that candidates don’t write to the formula and ignore the demands of the questions. Candidates are not expected to refer to any other religious or non-religious traditions in their response in addition to Judaism.

Many responses included analysis and judgement although they were often underdeveloped. This was particularly the case when candidates had focussed on breadth of content rather than depth of argument and analysis. There is no set formula for the demonstration of these skills. Some candidates began each paragraph with a connection to the preceding argument e.g. ‘Further evidence for this argument would be...’ or ‘On the other hand some Orthodox Jews would consider this contradictory because...’. Some candidates referred to each point in terms of it being perceived as a strong or weak argument. For this to be creditworthy an explanation must be given as to **why** it would be considered a weak or strong argument rather than a reiteration of the point made. There were some excellent responses in which candidates had selected three or four areas for discussion and used those as a foundation for their argument and analysis.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1**
- (a)** This was very well answered with most candidates being able to define ‘Messiah’, often with reference to ‘the anointed one.’ A minority of candidates referred to definitions of the Messiah as perceived in Christianity which were not creditworthy e.g. ‘when Jesus returns’.
 - (b)** Most candidates engaged with the question but sometimes the responses were limited to a definition of a covenant or a short biography of Abraham. Some candidates confused the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant. It was pleasing to see how many candidates had an understanding of the life of Abraham from which to contextualise their description.
 - (c)** Most responses made reference to a diversity of views within Judaism and to correctly contextualise them within Reform or Orthodox traditions.

There was often a good use of religious language and references to sources of authority, such as the teachings of Maimonides and rabbinic teachings regarding Gan Eden. A minority of candidates included references to Christian beliefs about life after death, with references to Hell and Purgatory which were not awarded credit.

- (d) The question required an evaluative discussion regarding whether **all** Jews should keep the 613 mitzvot. It was pleasing to note that most candidates discussed why some Jews would not (or indeed could not) keep all the mitzvot. Many responses made relevant and insightful references to the mitzvot appertaining to the Temple and the over-riding of most mitzvot in cases of pikuach nefesh. It was pleasing to see the confidence that candidates were drawing upon relevant areas of the specification to justify their arguments.

- Q.2**
- (a) This was well answered with many candidates giving examples of kosher foods. Some candidates also referred to a wider meaning of 'kosher' to include practices as detailed in the Torah.
 - (b) There were some disappointing responses to this question with a significant number of candidates unaware of the festival. The specification refers to the 'origin, meaning and celebration of sukkot' but many responses were unable to make any reference at all to the 'origin' or 'meaning' but focussed on how the festival is celebrated.
 - (c) Most candidates engaged with this question which differentiated very well. Many candidates referred to a range of indicators of importance including a place of prayer, celebration, community activities, identity and study. Some responses focussed on the main features of the synagogue which was outside the remit of the question unless the response referred to how these features were of specific importance to Judaism.
 - (d) Although this was the final question it was pleasing to see the quality of response from many candidates. Within their responses many candidates insightfully referred to different celebrations from the specification which could be considered more important. It was pleasing to note how candidates referred to a range of relevant content specification within their justifications including Brit Milah; Bar Mitzvah; weddings; Pesach; Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Many candidates referred to how judgements of importance would depend on individual views. It was pleasing to note how candidates used sources of authority, such as the Ten Commandments in their justification. It was also pleasing to note how many candidates understood the underlying concepts of specific festivals such as Pesach (freedom) and Yom Kippur (atonement) in order to reinforce their justifications. Again, there was evidence of a sophisticated understanding of the specification which was often expressed in insightful use of religious language e.g. 'the ten commandments which are part of the 613 mitzvot.'

Summary of key points

- Most responses demonstrated an insightful understanding of key Jewish beliefs and concepts which reflected an engagement with the specification.
- Some candidates made reference to other religions or non-religious traditions and this is **not** a requirement for this paper and will not be credited.
- Many responses incorporated a sophisticated use of relevant religious language.
- There was an increasing reference to topical debates and events within Judaism e.g. Mitzvah Day; secular Jews; Limmud; and Orthodox female rabbis.
- There was an understanding of diversity between and within different branches of Judaism.
- 'D' questions require analysis and formulaic responses in which each paragraph describes a different Jewish perspective e.g. Orthodox would say/Reform would say - can sometimes restrict evaluative discussion.
- In a minority of responses there appeared to be little understanding of the context of Abraham and Moses and how that context relates to other parts of the specification e.g. Brit Milah; Pesach; giving of the Ten Commandments; Sukkot; nature of God.
- It is important for candidates to fully understand the demands of the question e.g. 'most important', 'origin and meaning' and 'all Jews'.



WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk