

GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

B2 / 40552 Religion and Life Issues

Report on the Examination

4055
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General Comments

Most students found this year's paper very accessible with few unanswered questions and specific religious teachings were found in many of the answers. This is important as it helps towards obtaining the higher levels in the 3, 4 or 6 mark questions. Some of the answers were outstanding and showed that the students had been very well prepared. Some made good use of the diversity of opinion within the Christian tradition, whilst others made excellent use of teachings and beliefs from two or more religions.

There were few rubric infringements but some students answered all six questions. In these cases most of the answers lacked depth, as it is time-consuming trying to answer every question. Many would probably have scored higher marks if they had concentrated on four questions, as required by the exam. Some students attempted the parts of the questions out of sequence. Although this is allowed, it is probably not a good idea to do all the six mark AO2 questions first. This often resulted in students not completing the exam, since so much time had been taken up writing longer answers than those required for these questions. In addition, the questions are normally designed to lead logically from one part to another in a way which should be helpful to those taking the exam. Furthermore, several students who did not follow the numbering as printed on the exam paper ended up missing one or two questions. This may have been because they had not realised that they had not answered all the question parts.

Unfortunately the problem of mixing up Islamic and Hindu teaching remains. Several also expressed the view that Buddhists do things because of god and incorrectly stated that Buddhists believe that people and animals have a soul. However, where students could correctly identify or contrast beliefs or teachings from different religions, it generally helped them achieve high marks.

A significant number of students answered 'why' to a 'how' type question and did not understand the difference between a 'describe' and 'explain' question. It is important for students to understand the command words which may be used and also to read the questions carefully so that the answers have the correct focus.

Some students have not mastered the skill of using the beliefs and teachings of the different religions in the AO2 answers in an evaluative way. The beliefs and/or teachings are sometimes listed as supporting or opposing a viewpoint, but no real reasoning is given and little informed insight is shown.

Schools and colleges should be aware that whole questions on topics will consist of four or five parts, making up a total of 18 marks; 9 marks for AO1 and 9 for AO2. There will always be two AO2 questions, one a 3-mark question and the other a 6-mark question. Marks for individual questions for AO1 may differ from year to year, but, for each whole question, there will always be two or three questions for AO1, totalling 9 marks. Therefore any combination is possible, eg 2, 3, 4, or 1, 3, 5, or 3, 3, 3 etc. Whichever combination is chosen will apply to all whole questions on the paper. This enables examiners to examine the AO1 assessment objective in relation to the specification in the most appropriate way, depending on the content being examined from year to year. This is fairer to students. It enables technical terms or more challenging parts of the specification to be examined appropriately and provides students with opportunities to write at greater length on issues where there is a greater body of knowledge or explanation available.

An extra four marks were again available for SPaG. Like last year, many students were unable to correctly spell important technical terms, including the different faiths and in particular Buddhism or Buddhists. 'Believe' was often spelt as 'belive' and there were numerous variations on the spelling of 'dominion' and 'stewardship'. Many did not write in paragraphs for the six-mark AO2 questions

and some wrote incredibly long sentences. Commas and capital letters were often left out and / or put in the wrong places. 'Could of' and 'would of' were sometimes used instead of 'could have' or 'would have'.

Question 1 Religion and Animal Rights

This was the most popular question on the paper and there were some good responses produced. Particularly notable this year was the excellent use of Buddhist and Hindu teachings in this section by some students. Many, however, used biblical quotations which apply only to humans to justify their ideas concerning the value or treatment of animals, eg 'Love thy neighbour'.

01 Most students were able to name two different sports in which animals are used. A wide variety of sports were mentioned, with horse racing being the most popular response. The most common error was to just name the animals and not the sport.

02 Good reference was made to the work of animal welfare groups like the WWF and RSPCA, joining or supporting conservation projects, becoming a vegetarian or vegan or campaigning against the mistreatment of wildlife. A significant minority wrote about why it is important to protect wildlife rather than the actions religious believers might take. Such an approach was not answering the question.

03 The strongest answers to this question usually focused on the positive use of animal skills for work (eg guide dogs or sniffer dogs) or included ideas about dominion and stewardship. Some referred to Muslim beliefs about being judged on how they treat animals and some included reference to biblical teachings such as 'Do not muzzle the ox' and Proverbs 12: 10 'A good man is kind to his animals'. Weaker responses tended not to go beyond the idea of avoiding cruelty.

04 Many approached this question as if it was an evaluation of whether or not human life is more valuable than animal life. Students were not asked to debate the issue but to explain why some religious believers value human life more than animal life. The contrary view was not credited. The strongest answers focused on the ideas that people have souls and are made in God's image, are at the top of the food chain and samsara cycle, have more intelligence and have religious beliefs. Those who did not refer to religious beliefs and teachings were unable to reach the top levels, although secular ideas were credited.

05 This six-mark AO2 question was the most well answered of all the equivalent questions on the paper. Many referred to dominion and stewardship, ahimsa, compassion and kindness, Judgment Day and the need to make medical advances and find cures to terrible diseases like cancer. Some referred to other methods of experimentation which do not cause suffering and a minority included content about cloning and genetic engineering. Some, when writing from a Christian perspective, incorrectly tried to apply 'sanctity of life' to animals when saying that they should not be used for experimentation.

Question 2 Religion and Planet Earth

This question was generally well answered, although a small minority struggled with understanding questions 08 and 09.

06 This question was well answered, with many referring to the destruction of natural habitats, the effects on animal and plant life or the impact on climate change with less CO₂ being taken out of the atmosphere. Some mentioned positive effects such as providing employment or wood for furniture and other purposes.

07 Most understood this as an action question and so did describe what religious believers might do to reduce pollution. Many included ideas concerning the need to reduce the carbon footprint, recycle and reuse as well as clearing up litter, campaigning and educating people.

08 Many of the answers to this question were very general and it was not clear whether the term ‘international action’, the term used in the specification, was understood. The strongest answers included reference to Earth Summits and to the fact that international action and following religious teachings are not mutually exclusive.

09 Some students did not understand the term ‘natural resources’, which resulted in some superficial answers. The strongest answers referred to resources being there to be used in a sustainable way and not exploited. The ideas of stewardship, use of renewable energy, the Hindu belief that nature is sacred, being trustees for God, having dominion and the need to consider future generations featured strongly in answers which reached the highest levels of the mark scheme.

10 This question prompted some excellent responses with religious teachings applied to support the reasons for the opinions being expressed. Some struggled to develop an argument as to why having a good lifestyle is more important than caring for the planet beyond the ideas that we only live once and what we do will make little difference. Some of the strongest answers interpreted ‘good lifestyle’ as having a good standard of living rather than living in poverty and enduring pain and suffering. Many wrote about stewardship and the need to be concerned about future generations, thus ensuring that development is sustainable, as humans depend on a planet created by God that is irreplaceable.

Question 3 Religion and Prejudice

This was the third most popular section and brought a varied response.

11 Most responses were able to give two examples of the effects of prejudice. The feeling of worthlessness, depression, ‘leads to self-harm’, ‘causes someone to be racist’ were among the many ideas given in response to this question.

12 There were a lot of good answers explaining why many religious believers are against discrimination. The Golden Rules were very much in evidence, as well as reference to the sanctity of life and being created in God’s image. Many good examples were given: eg the Holocaust, the parable of the Good Samaritan, equality shown on the Hajj, the Buddhist turtle story.

13 Some did not refer to being ‘true to their religious beliefs’ but most were able to gain at least two of the three marks available. The strongest answers distinguished between being prejudiced and actually putting that into action and discriminating. Some good religious teachings were included by those who supported the statement and those who opposed it gave examples of other influences, eg the media or upbringing and/or wrote about where they saw prejudice within religion, eg women separated from men in prayer, exclusive male leadership, etc.

14 This question showed the importance of actually reading the question. It asked for a description of the work of a religious believer who has fought against prejudice. Many answers had little about the work but quite a lot about the life history of the person chosen and why they chose to fight against prejudice. Such an approach may have gained some marks but did not allow responses to reach the top levels. The religious believers chosen included Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and Desmond Tutu. With a minority of students, there was some confusion

between Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Nelson Mandela and some wrote about several people rather than just the one which the question required.

15 Some students did not understand that 'ignorance' in this statement meant lack of knowledge. This resulted in many answers being superficial and not focused. A wide interpretation of 'ignorance' was allowed. The strongest answers compared the different causes, eg bad experience, media, upbringing and religion with lack of knowledge and good use was made of Galatians 3: 28 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Question 4 Religion and Early Life

This was the second most popular choice and generally well answered.

16 Although most students gained full marks for this question, a minority did not read the final word of the question. They gave religious ideas about life and not 'when human life begins'. Conception was the most popular correct answer, although several students wrote 'contraception' when they probably meant 'conception'. Several students incorrectly stated that Buddhists believe that human life begins when the foetus receives a soul. Ensoulment was a correct answer for those referring to Islam.

17 This question was very well answered, with students being able to explain that religious believers often see children as a gift from God as they are a blessing, a miracle of life, made in God's image and the planet's future.

18 This was the best answered of all the three mark AO2 questions. Most agreed that religious believers should encourage adoption rather than abortion because of the sanctity of life and because many couples unable to have children of their own would love to adopt a child. Many gave a two-sided response (although this was not required) by explaining that abortion might be considered the right option in some circumstances.

19 Students who knew the conditions in UK law that are used to decide if a legal abortion can take place reached the higher levels of the mark scheme. A minority did not access the higher levels because they wrote about pro-life or pro-choice pressure groups, or focused on explaining why laws are necessary rather than the circumstances in which abortion might be allowed.

20 Students tended to write quite a lot for this question, but many did not reach the top level because they did not focus on the statement that 'abortion should be allowed **only** if the mother's life is in danger'. Many answers simply debated the pros and cons of abortion and therefore did not fully address the question.

Question 5 Religion, War and Peace

This was the fourth most popular choice of question and was generally answered well.

21 Most realised that this was an action question and came up with ideas of what religious believers might do to help victims of war. Answers included joining or raising money for organisations which help those suffering, eg Red Cross / Red Crescent or Help for Heroes. Giving medical assistance or protesting against the war also featured strongly in the responses from students.

22 A high percentage scored the maximum two marks for giving examples of conflicts between countries. A wide range of examples were given both from historical conflicts such as the

Crusades, the First and Second World Wars to modern situations such as Afghanistan and Ukraine and Russia. Ideological disputes and political differences were also accepted, as were conflicts over land, oil etc, but civil war was not credited as the question asked for example of conflicts between countries.

23 Most students disagreed with the statement giving reasons why any war should not happen, because it brings death, destruction and casualties. Many stated that war is not holy but evil and that it is hypocritical of those who profess to follow teachings of peace to fight for God. Those who supported the idea of holy war generally focused on the idea of defending their religion and the Islamic belief in a lesser Jihad.

24 Good religious teachings and quotations were used to explain why some religious believers are pacifists. The first precept, the concept of ahimsa, 'blessed are the peacemakers', 'turn the other cheek', 'those who take the sword will die by the sword', 'do not kill', 'if your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat' and many other teachings featured in many good answers. Some responses, however, gave the opposing idea of why some religious believers are not pacifists. This was not answering the question and so was not credited.

25 This question proved to be accessible to nearly all students. It gave students the opportunity to evaluate whether or not peace can occur everywhere and most concluded that it was highly unlikely that this will ever be achieved because of human greed, clash of religions or ideologies and lust for power. Some answers referred to good religious teachings, eg Matthew 24: 6 and argued that real peace will only happen after the Second Coming of Christ. Some did not access the top marks because they did not clearly focus on the statement and in particular on the word 'everywhere'.

Question 6 Religion and Young People

This section was the least popular and was generally not well answered.

26 Most students were able to give two examples of rights that a young person has. The most popular responses included a right to be educated, to choose a religion, to express their views and a right to life.

27 Nearly all students were able to name a faith group which teaches young people about their religion, but many struggled to actually describe one activity which enables this to happen. Many of the stronger answers focused on the activities of the Girls' and Boys' Brigades or Junior Church but most did not access the highest mark available for this question.

28 Most students gained two or three marks for evaluating whether or not school assemblies should be religious. Many stated that the law says that they should be acts of worship and it provides an opportunity to learn for spiritual and moral education, although the purpose is not to persuade young people to join a particular faith. Those who argued against usually focused on saying that not all young people are religious so it would not be relevant to them, or they may be a member of a different faith and so would not be able to participate.

29 Many answers to this question were superficial. Some gave the opinion that parents forced children to be religious and to be good. The strongest answers included ideas about parents being role models and guiding their children to adopt moral codes which will aid them in making the right choices in life. Mention was made of the idea that spirituality and morality is first learned in the home from the parents.

30 Few responses reached the top level in this question. This was often due to one-sided responses or students not understanding the meaning of peer pressure. Many appeared to believe that peer pressure is the same as family pressure and so focused on the influence of parents without reference to their friends. The strongest answers combined the ideas of marginalisation, ridicule, being unable to join in activities with their friends (eg drinking) with the influence of the media, science and non-believing parents.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)