



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

8062/2A: Paper 2A Thematic Studies (excluding textual studies)
Report on the Examination

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REPORT ON THE EXAMINATION

It is pleasing to report that the number of students for this examination has increased again this year and most students were able to attempt to answer each question for their chosen themes. However, one concern raised by markers was the increase in the number of scripts which were difficult to read because of poor handwriting. This may well be one of the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and missed time in school plus the increasing amount of work being done on computers. There were quite a number of typed answers this year which in those cases obviously overcame the problem of illegible scripts.

There was a reduction in the number of students attempting to answer all the questions on the paper so fewer broke the rubric than in the past. That was pleasing as it meant that most students were able to develop their points rather than answer superficially.

There was an adjustment made to marking for the .3 (4 mark) questions on this paper. The specification may be interpreted to imply that only contrast questions will be asked when the 'main religious tradition of Great Britain' version of the .3 question is used. In some themes a similarity question was asked. However, students should have prepared both for similarities and contrasts for the topics examined as required by the specification. Therefore, for this series only, in order to ensure no student was disadvantaged, the instruction to refer to the 'main religious tradition of GB' was disregarded. This meant that answers from any religion were credited (and a non-religious perspective in Theme C). In addition, correct answers were credited whether either a contrast or similarity was given. This applied to all .3 (four mark) questions in this paper and ensured that no student was disadvantaged.

For the .4 (5 mark) questions on the paper several students are still not naming the source for which the fifth mark is awarded. Many are including quotations from sacred writings or individual important religious leaders but are not saying where the quotes come from or who said them. This means that they are missing out on the source of authority mark for these .4 questions. They need to attribute the quotes/teachings to, for example, the Qur'an, the Bible, the Torah or individuals such as the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi, Guru Nanak, Muhammad, the Pope or Jesus.

For the twelve-mark questions few are now writing one sided answers which limit the maximum mark to six out of twelve. More are now adopting the approach of attempting to evaluate throughout their answers rather than just in a final concluding paragraph. That is fine but some are simply saying 'This is a (weak or strong) argument because...' and then continue with a new point of view, not an evaluation of the point of view just given. For example, 'Giving money direct to a charity is the best way because then they get big sums of money and can do big things with it. This is a strong argument because you could give the money yourself to a homeless person.' There is no evaluation of the best way in this example, just different points of view.

The paper proved to be accessible to most as there were very few blanks in the responses from the students. There was good use of specialist terms by many students and at least the intermediate grade was obtained by most for SPaG.

Theme A – Relationships and families

This was the most popular choice on the paper and was very well done by most students.

- 1.1 – There were very few incorrect answers to this question. It proved to be a very good start for most students as more obtained the maximum mark than on any other question on the paper.
- 1.2 – Approximately three quarters of students secured the two marks for the role of parents in a religious family. A small number of students did describe the roles of children rather than parents, so gained no marks. The mark scheme allowed for credit to be given for responses more akin with roles of marriage, e.g. procreation, which was helpful to students, as a significant number did offer this as one of their two options. A small number of students wrote at length, rather than giving the short response required.
- 1.3 – A small minority did not know the term ‘contraception’, though this was less common than in the past. Answers mainly followed two routes – agreeing with it because it is part of sensible family planning; disagreeing because sex is (mainly) for procreation. Please note that Roman Catholics do not believe that sexual intercourse is only for procreation although they do believe that there should be the possibility of conception. The vast majority did contrast the two points being made, and most used Christianity in one or both answers. It was unusual to see answers from traditions other than the western faiths; both points coming from Christianity was quite a common response (usually contrasting Roman Catholicism with ‘other’ Christian beliefs).
- 1.4 – Most responses focussed on same-sex relationships rather than same-sex marriage, as per the question. Credit was given to the responses which were almost exclusively attitudes to homosexual sex. The teaching of choice was about homosexuality being abhorrent, quoting ‘And with a male you shall not lie as one lies with a woman...’ but many failed to say that it was from Leviticus or the Old Testament. Many contrasted this with the idea that Quakers have no problem with same-sex marriage if the couple are in love and ‘Love thy neighbour’ or the Golden Rule was often quoted. Approximately 50% scored four or five marks for this question.
- 1.5 - This was a very straight-forward evaluation question, which was treated to wide-ranging responses. Predominantly these responses focused on Christian attitudes often emphasising that the Roman Catholic Church teaching is against divorce but in some circumstances may allow an annulment. Most wrote that religious couples have made vows before God eg ‘till death us do part’, so it is wrong to break them unless there is a compelling reason to do so. Many said that marriage is a sacrament and all possibilities of reconciliation should be tried before getting a divorce. Many answered from a Muslim perspective saying that Islam permits divorce reluctantly. The quotes ‘Of all legal things the one Allah hates the most is divorce.’ (Qur’an) and ‘The throne of Allah shakes due to divorce.’ (Hadith) was much in evidence. Arguments for allowing divorce included the ideas that it is better for a marriage to end than for an abusive relationship to continue and children may benefit from the couple splitting as greater harm may be done by them remaining in the situation eg through experiencing domestic violence, drug addiction or alcoholism.

Theme B – Religion and life

This was also a popular question this year although it wasn't quite so well answered as Theme A.

- 2.1 – The majority wrote 'D' or 'evolution' which was the correct response.
- 2.2 – Most students handled the terms quite well, and were able to gain one or both marks. The broad interpretation of mark scheme allowed for examples to be credited, not just reasons, and this was helpful for many.
- 2.3 – Most gave generalisations in answering this question. It was the exception when quotes like 'The righteous care for the needs of their animals' - Proverbs 12:10 ' were used. Most wrote about stewardship, or God's creation along with the idea of not causing harm to animals. There were some good Buddhist answers referring to ahimsa and the First Moral Precept. A small number of students did try to show why religions justify the use of animal experimentation, which was not credited as the question asked about beliefs opposing animal testing. Very few did not attempt to answer the question.
- 2.4 – The idea that God created humans to look after the world (Genesis – Adam and Eve looked after the Garden of Eden) was evident in many responses, and reference was often made to stewardship and/or dominion. Several picked up the source mark for this question. Those that used Buddhism in their response often referred to the belief that it is an unskilful action to abuse the environment and against the First Moral Precept. Some used the Jewish teaching of tikkun olam (healing the world) but few explicitly made the point that human survival depends on protecting the environment as we only have one world. A few mentioned climate change as a challenge and the way the environment is treated will affect future generations so people should reduce, reuse and recycle.
- 2.5 – This question gave many students an opportunity to discuss a wide range of issues so very few did not attempt an answer. The variety of responses included the importance of life (the sanctity of life) and how good deeds would help in the afterlife or focussed on abortion or euthanasia or the belief that bad behaviour leads to a bad afterlife. Answers were given using beliefs from the western faiths about heaven and hell or from the eastern faiths about rebirth or reincarnation. Some made the point that some religions teach that people have to believe and follow their religion to be rewarded and others argued that valuing and protecting human life is common sense so a reward in the afterlife shouldn't be a consideration.

Theme C – The existence of God and revelation

This was the least popular question and appeared to be answered by some students who had not studied this theme.

- 3.1 – Most responses were correct in answering this question.
- 3.2 – Many students confused the Design Argument with the First Cause Argument and around 50% gained no marks for this question. The mark scheme did allow examples/evidence as valid answers, which helped some score full marks.
- 3.3 – This was the best answered of the four-mark questions on the paper. Many used examples of miracles from the Bible or places of pilgrimage such as Lourdes and often gave contrasts

concerning how they are viewed by religious believers and those who do not believe. Answers included the idea that miracles inform people about God and God's characteristics, are rare but positive occurrences. Whereas others stated that some believe that there are scientific explanations for what are claimed to be miracles or some people who claim miracles are lying or hallucinating.

- 3.4 –** It was clear that many students did not understand the term 'immanence' which is a key term for the section. This meant that they did not get many/any marks. This proved to be the most difficult question on the paper. Again the issue of not providing a source was clear for this question. For those that did know the meaning of the term there were some very good answers, rich with teachings, explanation and clarity, and which reflected most of the major world faiths, rather than being focused on just Christianity and Islam.
- 3.5 –** This question did not require students to describe God, but the best responses gave qualities of God as evidence of the merit of different forms of revelation. They went beyond the idea that any revelation proves God, or provides evidence of God, and into the actual knowledge gleaned. Many students did as expected, comparing general and special revelation and their relative importance as a source of knowledge about God. Some students simply argued about the importance of general revelation, ie why it was important versus why it needs to be ignored/discredited. Both styles of response were valid. Unfortunately some students did not understand the term general revelation or mixed up the two forms of revelation.

Theme D – Religion, peace and conflict

This was the second most popular choice this year and was really well answered by most candidates.

- 4.1 –** There were few incorrect answers to this question.
- 4.2 –** Most students had no issue in securing both marks for this question which concerned how victims of war might be helped by religious organisations. Those that didn't get the answers correct usually misread the question and named the religious organisations instead of giving two ways in which they help.
- 4.3 –** It was often the case that students wrote about violence perpetrated by an individual against another (that it is wrong), and/or how religious people should respond to violence. Many used the example of Jesus' teaching of 'Turn the other cheek' and contrasted it with the idea of it being permissible to use violence in self-defence or to protect religion. Where a student did focus on war, they usually offered a pacifistic response contrasted with Just or Holy War (or Lesser Jihad). Similarly Buddhist responses invariably focussed on ahimsa or the First Moral Precept.
- 4.4 –** The answers given usually focussed on the idea that religions are opposed to injustice and campaign for what is right and fair. Many wrote about God being just and judgement day. Some answered from the angle of criminal justice and credit was given for the widest scope of these responses. It was noticeable that a number of students wrote about forgiveness exclusively, and did not show how it applied to the concept of justice. Again many did not include a source and so scored four rather than the maximum five marks.

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- 4.5** – Many students ignored the ‘being prepared’ part of the statement and wrote fluently about whether it was right to fight in a war which limited their marks. There were, however, some excellent answers showing clearly and coherently how being prepared prevents and/or leads to war, ie is a double-edged sword. Some approached their answer from a personal perspective whereas others tackled it from a country angle and many used the idea that weapons of mass destruction are a deterrent which helps to keep the peace. Some referred to the current war in Ukraine.

Theme E – Religion, crime and punishment

This was quite a popular choice of question this year.

- 5.1** – This was the least well answered of the one-mark questions. Several answered choosing poverty or greed instead of reformation.
- 5.2** – Few students failed to gain full marks for this question. The most popular responses included the ideas that prison acts as a deterrent, protects society from serious criminals, gives the law breaker time to reflect on their actions, may help to reform the prisoner and doesn’t involve physical punishment.
- 5.3** – Many responses were able to explain in detail attitudes to forgiveness. Many included the examples of Jesus saying forgive 70 x 7, his prayer on the cross asking God to forgive those who were crucifying him and the need to forgive others as stated in the Lord’s Prayer. Predominantly the answers were from a Christian perspective but there were some good Buddhist answers as well.
- 5.4** – On this question, concerning religious views about the crime or murder, almost all students gave ‘do not kill’, and prefaced it with ‘The Ten Commandments’, so securing the source mark. Most answered this in terms of why it is wrong as a crime (the worst crime). A small number answered about attitudes to those who commit murder, including how they should be punished. Either was creditworthy.
- 5.5** – Most candidates tackled this quite well; juxtaposing religious law and secular law. The most common ideas supporting the statement were that laws are ultimately from God who has allowed the authorities to put them in place to protect citizens and without them there would be chaos. Opposing the statement, many wrote about unjust laws, or laws going against religious duties/laws or someone breaking the law in order for their family to survive. This was the sort of question where it was important to give examples rather than write in generalisations.

Theme F – Religion, human rights and social justice

This was not a popular question on this paper and the performance of candidates was rather mixed.

- 6.1** – Nearly all candidates obtained the mark for this question.
- 6.2** – This question was also well answered with most managing to write about the responsibilities of wealth usually saying that it should be used to help others, and not be greedy.

- 6.3** – This question brought a mixed response. Those who understood the question usually wrote saying that freedom of religious expression is a basic human right resulting from equality and that religious tolerance is encouraged. Others explained that the duty in many religions is to be open to express one’s personal beliefs and evangelise without fear of persecution.
- 6.4** – Given that the Theme has ‘Social Justice’ in its title, it was disappointing that some students did not understand the term. Many, for example, wrote about criminal justice. Those that knew the meaning gained good marks writing about issues such as fairness, prejudice, equality and/or freedom. The teaching of Jesus such as ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’ (Luke 10:28), ‘Do to others what you would have them to do you’ (Matthew 7:12), Parable of the sheep and the goats, ‘I was hungry you fed me.. a stranger you welcomed me... sick you visited me...as you did it for one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’. (Matthew 25:35-40), ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3:28) were the most popular quotations.
- 6.5** – This evaluation question was generally well answered although some did not focus on the best way. Many wrote about the good work of different charities as they are able to respond to situations and direct money to where there is the greatest need. Other ways of helping mentioned included giving money direct to the poor or helping by running food banks, helping through organisations such as Citizen's Advice or providing tools and education to help people become independent perhaps by setting up their own business. Some suggested that giving direct to the poor ensures that all the money is targeted at the need and avoids the administration costs of charities. A concern was expressed that some of the money might be misused on things like drugs and addiction. There were some useful religious quotes including reference to the Parable of the Sheep and Goats or ‘He who eats and drinks whilst his brother goes hungry is not one of us’ (Hadith) and methods of helping e.g. through the langar or giving sadaqah.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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