
GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

8063/2A Paper 2A Section B: Perspectives on faith (themes)
Report on the Examination

8063
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General comments

Centres had clearly made every effort to prepare their students for this examination. A significant number of students across the full range of ability, however, answered all three questions. This was more common than in the past, when able students almost always restricted themselves to two themes. It was perhaps due to the disruption in preparation caused by the pandemic, though in the case of weaker students who had been prepared for themes A and C, the attraction of a very accessible AO2 question in 02.5 and perhaps a more challenging one in 03.5 might have led them to answer this theme also. Those who answer all three themes run the risk of not having time to answer all questions fully or of running out of time on the religions paper, which is taken in the same examinations session. Where students applied the rubric correctly, most selected themes A and B, which was a change from previous examination sessions, in which themes A and C were the most popular choices.

There were unanswered questions in a significant number of scripts. This was particularly the case with 02.3, 03.4 and 03.5. Marks were also lost through not reading questions carefully as in 01.5, failing to note the instructions following the questions in 1.3, 2.3 and 3.3 and not making attribution to a source of authority in 01.4, 02.4 and 03.4. However, examiners commented on the much wider range of religious teachings than in the past, often with very accurate attribution. Some centres appear to be making use of Youcat as well as of the more traditional sources of Catholic teaching, perhaps seeing it as more accessible to their students. ‘Love your neighbour’ did appear, but not to the exclusion of other teachings. Centres might, however, wish to point out to their students that this is not one of the Ten Commandments. Most students attempted to give two viewpoints in the AO2 questions.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar were for the most part reasonable, most students gaining two or three marks, but handwriting continues to be a problem.

Question 1 Theme A: Religious, relationships and families

01.1 was answered correctly by almost all students.

01.2 relating to the right of single people to be parents, was also generally well answered, though some students included reasons that would not be acceptable to Christians, and sometimes the same reason was repeated in a different way. Most students suggested that single parents could give the same care as two parents, and some gave circumstances which would lead Christians to agree with single parenthood, eg the death of a spouse or adoption.

01.3 was a question on beliefs about adultery. There was some confusion with the question of sex before marriage, and some wrote about divorce being adultery without mentioning remarriage. Others did not note the requirement to refer to a Christian view, and so where no indication of this could be found, answers were capped at two marks. Centres might wish to train their students to start one viewpoint with the words ‘Christians believe’. There were, however, some excellent answers that displayed sound understanding of the vows made in marriage ceremonies as well as the harms caused by adultery. Many students referred to remarriage after divorce as being adultery, and the development of these answers sometimes included accurate reference to Jesus’ teaching. Answers justifying adultery usually referred to changed attitudes to extra-marital relationships in modern society.

It was pleasing to see the thoughtful and sensitive approach of students to question

01.4 on homosexuality. Most students gained four or five marks. Those who were awarded four marks often included biblical or Church teaching in their answers, but failed to attribute it to a source of authority. There were, however, many attributed references to procreation in Genesis, the law in Leviticus, the teaching of the Magisterium and the statement made to journalists by Pope Francis, in which he said, ‘If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?’ Many answers differentiated between orientation and practice, stating that celibacy was the preferred option. It was particularly pleasing to see a wide range of teaching, and not just ‘be fruitful and multiply’, though where that quotation was used, there was usually also developed application of it to the question.

01.5 was an example of failure to read the statement in the question carefully. There were many very lengthy answers that failed to reach the higher levels because they related to Church teachings and social attitudes rather than to biblical teachings. The question clearly related to biblical teachings, so anything else was irrelevant. Only 51% of responses reached Level 3, and of those, only 15% were awarded Level 4. Almost 4% did not attempt the question, perhaps because they could not think of any appropriate biblical teachings. Study of biblical teachings is required by the specification. The first bullet point of dialogue 4 in theme 1 states: ‘Foundational equality of women and men in biblical tradition’. There were, however, some excellent responses with very thoughtful discussion. In support of the statement, many discussed the significance of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. Deborah, Ruth and Esther were referred to as women who performed important roles in ancient Israel, when men were usually dominant, and the significance of Phoebe as a deacon in the Early Church was also considered. Mary the mother of Jesus, not surprisingly, was often referred to, as was also the fact that Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Jesus. A few scripts made effective use of Mark 10:11-12, which had been used earlier in answer to 01.3 and which put women and men on an equal footing in the issue of remarriage after divorce. On the other side of the argument, many students considered alternative interpretations of Genesis 2 and pointed to Jesus’ choice of men as the twelve disciples and as the recipients of his commission, though sometimes adding the comment that it would have been impossible in the first century for Jesus’ ministry to have got off the ground, had he chosen women. Many were familiar with Paul’s teaching on marriage relationships in Ephesians, and with his instructions to the Corinthian Church about the behaviour of women in worship. A few also mentioned the teaching in 1 Timothy and there were some comments on the patriarchal language of the Bible in relation to God. In the best answers, evaluative judgements were made throughout the responses, displaying excellent engagement with the question.

Question 2 Theme B: Religion, peace and conflict

02.1 was answered correctly by the vast majority of students.

02.2 was on what is always a challenging topic: nuclear deterrence. To assist weaker students, a brief explanation of the term was given. This perhaps explains why almost 60% of students gained at least one mark. Some still wrote about the capacity of nuclear weapons to win wars with their destructive power, but most tried to focus on their possible value as a deterrent and a number referred to the concept of mutually assured destruction.

02.3 proved to be a very challenging question. More than 23% of students who answered other questions in theme B did not attempt the question and another 13% failed to gain any marks. It would appear that the term ‘martyrdom’ was not understood by a significant proportion of students. Centres might wish to address this issue. There were, however, some excellent responses, 33% of students gaining full marks. The view opposing martyrdom either made the point that martyrdom

was a waste of life or commented on the claims to martyrdom of some terrorists. Answers that referred to acts of terrorism were all both carefully worded and sensitive.

02.4 relating to Christian beliefs against bullying, was a very straightforward question, but many answers were very general, referring to ‘love your neighbour’ and the Golden Rule. Some students lost the focus of the question, giving as their second point teaching on responses to bullying. There were numerous references to the story of Cain and Abel, but there were also some responses that showed excellent knowledge of what was said about the dangers of the tongue in the epistle of James.

02.5 proved to be a very accessible question. Almost 60% of answers reached at least Level 3, with 20% of those achieving Level 4. Most students were able to give Christian teachings in support of the statement and make reference to elements of the Just War theory on the other side of the debate, although, as in the past, the criterion of proportionality was often not understood. The conflict in the Ukraine was used by some to illustrate their points.

Question 3 Theme C: Religion, human rights and social justice

03.1 was answered correctly by almost all students.

In 03.2, 72% of students gained both marks. A number of different reasons were given for it being acceptable for the Church to be wealthy, eg the importance of honouring God with beautiful churches and the use of wealth to build and support schools. Where only one mark was gained, it was often because the student made the same point twice.

03.3 was answered very successfully by those who remembered to give a Christian viewpoint. Support for giving money to the poor was made in a variety of ways. The parables of the sheep and goats and of the rich man and Lazarus were often considered. Arguments against included the often-expressed concerns that the money might be used for the wrong things or that donations might encourage dependency.

03.4 elicited some very vague and general answers from students. Often simple points were made, or the point given as the first view was repeated as the second. Many students did not focus on the question, which was about freedom of belief, and not about the right to freedom generally. There were, however, some good answers relating to the importance of using freedom of belief responsibly and of respecting the rights of others to freedom of belief. References to sources of authority were generally taken from the teachings of the Catholic Church, eg ‘No one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs’ (Dignitas Humanae 2) and ‘We impose our faith on no one’ (Pope Benedict XVI). Paraphrase of such sources was of course acceptable.

03.5 tackled what is always a challenging area of the specification. As with the question on nuclear deterrence in 02.3, so here the difficult term ‘positive discrimination’ was followed by a simple explanation in brackets in order to help weaker students. Perhaps this helped, as there were less blank spaces than in the past, and it may be that some of those were due to timing issues. Some of the responses in support of the statement were very general, but gained some credit for using biblical texts such as being created in the image of God to support their points, and they were often able to create simple arguments against, such as tightening and fully implementing the laws on race relations. Those who did understand what is entailed in positive discrimination produced some very insightful responses on both sides of the discussion. Just occasionally, responses that were otherwise very good were capped at Level 2 because no reference to religion could be found.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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