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GCSE

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

8062/2B: Thematic Studies (including textual studies)  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

Most students entered for this specification were well prepared and found all the questions accessible. A minority broke the rubric by attempting more than the required four questions and some did not attempt Themes G and H which is a requirement of this specification. More questions were answered than necessary sometimes and this usually resulted in the answers lacking the depth needed for the higher marks. The spelling punctuation and grammar marks which are awarded for the AO2 answers were generally good and students are becoming more adept at using relevant subject specific terminology and quoting sacred writings.

Some students fail to gain AO1 marks by referring to non-religious responses to the issues for question parts 3 and 4. When a question asks for religious beliefs or reasons it is not creditworthy to write about what atheists or humanists think or believe. Secular points including atheist and humanist opinions are perfectly valid along with religious views in the twelve mark AO2 answers. For the five mark part 4 questions, students are instructed to refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching and a mark is awarded for this. In many answers the source of the belief was not identified. Please ensure that students remember to make the source clear eg that the beliefs are based on what is recorded in the Bible or Qur'an. This applies particularly to Themes A – F.

## Theme A: Relationships and Families

- 1.1 It was disappointing that a significant number of students did not get this question right which concerned 'a nuclear family'. Centres need to make sure students know the key terms from the specification as they are clearly used to construct questions.
- 1.2 The mark scheme included gender roles, and hence many students found this very straightforward. Some gave actual quotes from sacred writings.
- 1.3 Where students went wrong, it was often because of writing about sex before marriage with no reference to cohabitation (and sex before marriage does not rely on cohabiting). Many included strict religious stances such as RC and Islam in terms of it being taboo/sin; contrasting with a more liberal Christian view of 'relationship of commitment, often leading to marriage' or a Buddhist view that cohabitation is not a problem in a loving caring relationship.
- 1.4 There was a real range of marks given to the answers to this question as there was some confusion with roles of marriage rather than the purpose of family.

Some students found this very difficult to provide a reference to a source of authority/belief/teaching, and many relied on 'go forth and multiply' without showing how this fulfilled the purpose of a family (to increase the number of the faithful, for example).

- 1.5 There were some very effective answers to this question. However, many strayed into a discussion of whether or not it is ok to be homosexual, rather than the key focus of whether those relationships should be disapproved of or not. This meant that many answers achieved level 3 rather than level 4. The most successful answers used attitudes to homosexuality and to discrimination to show that theoretically it is wrong to disapprove, but difficult not to for many religious believers. They then moved from that to show how disapproval – a mental attitude – did not need to lead to discrimination (a physical act). They also drew out the differing attitudes to homosexuality per se, and homosexual physical relationships, and how this affected disapproval (and whether it was right or wrong).

## Theme B: Religion and life

- 2.1** Very few students got this question wrong, showing that the concept of stewardship was well known.
- 2.2** Most students could give two ways to reduce pollution – if not they gave indirect ways, so that credit could still be awarded. The majority answered from an individual perspective, rather than how religious believers might influence what governments/businesses/societies could do. Some answered from a religious teachings/attitudes way – not giving any practical answers, which was not worthy of credit. This was a ‘how’ question, not a ‘why’ question.
- 2.3** Since contrast could be in terms of belief or issue, most students did well. The easiest option was to contrast harming God’s creation for our own greed, ie cosmetics with using God’s creation for our medicinal need. Many used Buddhist, Christian or Muslim beliefs and included beliefs about cruelty, stewardship and dominion.

The most common error was the use of sanctity of life in the Christian sense as an argument against the use of animals for experimentation. Whilst Christians see non-human life as special, only human life (with its soul) is sacred. Thus these answers were not credited.

- 2.4** Where students did not answer successfully, they failed to explain how **human** life began, and their answers were entirely about the creation of the world. Of course, humans were part of that creation, so some credit could be gained, but it was limited for these answers.
- 2.5** For many students this question became a discussion of the rights and wrongs of abortion, rather than focusing on whether an abortion to save the mother was the only appropriate reason. This meant that their answers were often limited below Level 4, as their responses did not directly address the statement. It is really important that answers focus on the statement for the AO2 questions. Most students scored between 5 and 9 marks for this question.

Many students gave religious teachings in their answer to support the points they made. It was common to see a ‘RCs disagree because...; other Christians agree because...’ which was a quite stilted way to answer this statement, and usually did not address it directly or fully.

## Theme C: The existence of God and revelation

- 3.1** Most were able to select the correct answer to this question. A few confused omnipotent with all-loving.
- 3.2** There were few issues with this question, though quite a number of students did not write briefly, and probably used too much time in answering it. A minority did not attempt it.
- 3.3** Apart from a small number who wrote about ghosts, most students who answered this got at least some marks. Many chose to give examples of religious visions to support their points – Bernadette Soubiroux, Joan of Arc, St

Paul, Moses all being used effectively. A small number used modern examples such as Nicky Cruz. Over half scored three or four marks.

- 3.4** This proved to be the most difficult question for students. Many struggled to really understand what this question was asking, seeming to find it a step too far to show how general revelation *was a way of understanding the divine*. Hence, whilst most could say what general revelation was, they could not all demonstrate beliefs about how it helps humans to understand the divine. Responses in the negative – that it does not help – and responses to say special revelation is a better way were both credited.

Providing a source of authority/belief/teaching was difficult for students, depending on the points they made or examples they used. For example, those who gave nature as an example, freely used a Genesis reference, whereas those who used revelation through the works of people found it more difficult. Surprisingly, scripture as a form of revelation did not always refer to a specific holy Book.

- 3.5** This was a straightforward evaluation question which brought a very wide range of responses. However many students did answer it by giving reasons for and against the existence of miracles, rather than whether their existence proves that there is a God. The more effective answers usually argued that miracles are a breach of natural law and only God is outside the universe and outside of nature. Consequently only God can breach natural law so miracles prove that God exists. Where students drew on their knowledge of Mark's Gospel here it helped.

#### **Theme D: Religion, peace and conflict**

- 4.1** Nearly all those who took the exam understood the term pacifism and got the mark for this question.
- 4.2** Almost three quarters of the responses achieved the maximum marks for this question as most were able to give ways religious believers can work for peace. There were a wide range of examples.
- 4.3** Reconciliation is a key term but it was a problem for many students who simply did not understand it, or understood it to mean 'forgiveness'. Whilst forgiveness is a part of reconciliation, full credit was not given to answers which explained only that. Around a quarter did not attempt an answer or scored zero marks for this question.

There were some effective answers about man's reconciliation with God through the death of Jesus – clearly those studying Christianity were able to use their knowledge on that paper. Cross-over links are to be encouraged so as to facilitate more coherent 'Religious Studies' thinking.

- 4.4** This question brought some very effective answers. Whilst it required a practical answer, it also needed a source of authority/belief/teaching. Many students were able to do that, as the ubiquitous 'Love thy neighbour' fits well to support the question. However, there were many examples of sources from all the major religions used in this answer as well.

**4.5** This was the most well-answered AO2 question. It was a straightforward statement which enabled students to demonstrate what they knew about religious attitudes to fighting in war. If it did lack anything, it was a focus on 'never' – so there was a tendency to argue for and against war which limited the level which some obtained.

### **Theme E: Religion, crime and punishment**

**5.1** Almost all those who chose this theme answered this question correctly.

**5.2** Most students were able to give two aims of punishment although a small number misread the question and wrote about types of punishment instead of aims.

**5.3** Answers to this question mainly focused on how criminals with an addiction should be punished or helped. That contrast provided the substance of most students' answers, ie 'x' says we should punish them..., whereas 'y' says we should help them...'. Most answers were from Christian and Muslim perspectives.

A number of students still – erroneously – believe that Christians say 'forgive and forget', ie do not punish, do nothing and just be nice to them. This was not credited.

A few students made the point of it depending on their crime – a significant point, as in fact punishment of any offender always depends on this. It was surprising not to see this point more often.

**5.4** Most were able to give two religious reasons why some people are against the death penalty. A minority did not read the word 'against' and gave reasons why religious believers might be in favour of capital punishment. No marks were awarded for giving teachings supporting the death penalty such as 'an eye for an eye'. This shows the importance of reading the questions carefully.

**5.5** The most effective answers to this question explored the point of prison as a punishment and whether it is fit for purpose (and who for). They wove in points about the aims of punishment and how these are fulfilled by imprisonment, and they used sources of religious authority/belief/teaching in support of their points. For many this was a simple case of 'prison – good or bad', which meant that their response did not exactly meet the statement. Often this was also an entirely non-religious response as well which limited their marks to Level 2.

### **Theme F: Religion, human rights and social justice**

**6.1** Well over ninety five per cent of the students got the correct answer for this question.

**6.2** This question was also well answered with most students demonstrating an understanding of why freedom of religion is an important human right.

**6.3** Often students wrote just about charity rather than focusing on being wealthy. Given that even the poorest can do charity by means other than giving wealth

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away (though some even do that), it was not possible to gain full credit from a response focused in this way. However, stating that religious people have a responsibility to use wealth in a positive and helpful way to assist the needy was valid when supported by reference to appropriate sacred writings eg The Parable of the Sheep and Goats or The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The most common answers were that God gives/blesses people with money or that it belongs to God/Allah and humans face the test of how they use the money. Religious references were very common in this answer – though ‘money is the root of all evil’ remains incorrect as a quotation.

**6.4** This was a straightforward question as most students clearly understood the term ‘people-trafficking’. Religious references were used freely and easily by the more able students (often two or three of them), so they easily achieved the fifth mark.

**6.5** Although a full range of marks were given for this question responses were hampered by not understanding the key term ‘positive discrimination’. For a student who did not understand this term they often just wrote about whether racial discrimination was wrong and why religious people should not agree with it. They did gain credit for this kind of a response but at a lower level.

## **Themes G and H**

The key message to be taken from Themes G and H is that students who were well prepared and familiar with the text of St Mark’s Gospel were well able to answer the questions, showing excellent knowledge and understanding and providing evidence for evaluation. A small number of students only answered from Themes A-F. This disadvantages them because it is a requirement of the rubric that Themes G and H are answered in this paper. Not every question in Themes G and H is a contrast question and certainly not about a contrast between believers and non-believers. Some students tried to turn every question into a contrast question.

### **Theme G: St Mark’s Gospel – the life of Jesus**

**7.1** Most students were able to correctly identify that the paralysed man was put through the roof in order to reach Jesus.

**7.2** This was a straightforward recall question requiring students to identify two of the ten or eleven things that Jesus predicted would happen to him in Jerusalem. Most scored full marks.

**7.3** This question on Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem required two contrasting views. Credit was given to those students who fully understood the implications of Jesus’ entry. They saw the differences between this as a triumphal entry and an entry of one who was demonstrating humility. A few tried to turn this into a question about how ‘some believe’ and how ‘non-believers think’. This worked, as long as the references to the text were correct.

**7.4** This question on the trial before the Jewish authorities was generally well answered. Some confused the trial before the Sanhedrin with the trial before Pilate. The key in these five mark questions is an accurate referral to the text. For many, this was Jesus’ use of the phrase ‘I am’ which led to the claim that he was committing blasphemy. Most students were able to make creditable points in their answers.

- 7.5** Students who had a sound knowledge and understanding of the Last Supper generally answered this question well, being able to provide good arguments as to why it was the most important event recorded in the Gospel. There were a range of alternative incidents which students argued were more important. These included the Baptism (presence of the Trinity), the miracles (God's power) the Crucifixion (understanding of atonement) and the resurrection. All the contrasts were accepted, as long as the student explained why one was more important than the other. This is the important part of these questions. The explanation as to why the contrast has been chosen and the relative importance of each is where the higher levels are achieved. It is not just an ability to recall the text or the events of Jesus' life.

**Theme H: St Mark's Gospel as source of religious, moral and spiritual truths.**

Although there are elements of recall in this theme it is the ability of the student to see the teachings behind the text which gains them credit.

- 8.1** This was not as well-known as 7.1. Levi was the disciple that was a former tax collector.
- 8.2** This question produced the least effective answers in the whole paper. There was much confusion about the teaching of the seed which grew, without understanding, leading to a harvest and its connection with judgement. Many confused this parable with the Parable of the Sower. This shows that careful revision of the different texts is essential.
- 8.3** Many knew the incident of the anointing at Bethany. A few confused it with the Baptism. What was required here was that there was approval by Jesus of the woman's actions, whereas some of those observing were critical. This is a question which allowed those who knew the text well to apply their knowledge and understanding.
- 8.4** Many students confused the Mission (Mark 6) with the Commission (Mark 16). Also, many did not develop their answers, even when they knew the correct incident. In these questions, students need to offer an explanation of what the text may mean. For example, 'Jesus told them to go in twos. This means that the disciples would have companionship/support/protection.' It can be as simple as this. There always needs to be accurate referral to the text. Many included an explanation of the command to brush the dust off their feet if rejected.
- 8.5** This was a broad question, given the amount of information there is on Peter in the Gospel of Mark. The most effective answers were able to balance the way that Jesus treated him as a member of the inner group and future leader, and his commitment to the faith, with the mistakes he made. Those who were familiar with the text were well able to make this balance work. Less able students made some reference to Peter's work as a disciple, but confused Peter's denial with the betrayal of Judas. Where students made reference to Peter's future activity as leader of the early church and his possible contribution to Mark's Gospel, this was credited.



### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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