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GCSE

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES B**

Paper 1 Catholic Christianity  
Report on the Examination

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## General Comments

In this first year of the new examination, it was pleasing to see how well schools and colleges had prepared their students, both in terms of course content and in addressing the style of the questions asked. The full range of ability was entered and most students found the paper accessible. There were some outstanding responses from students, particularly in the 12 mark essay questions. Students at the lower end of the ability range were at times let down by their linguistic ability, either because they did not understand what the question meant, or because they did not understand key terms from the specification such as ‘vocation’, ‘sacraments’, ‘stewards’ or ‘euthanasia’.

Questions 1 and 4 were more successfully attempted than Questions 2 and 3. Least well known appeared to be the topics assessed in 03.3 and 03.4: the contrasting ways of understanding the ‘Magnificat’ and two themes from key documents from the Second Vatican Council.

Some students had difficulty with questions that asked for **two** ideas or examples. Some concentrated all their efforts on the first answer and then neglected to give a second example. Questions that asked for ‘contrasting’ beliefs or ways of understanding demanded a different skill from previous examinations in this subject.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar was generally good, although capital letters and spelling of key terms continues to challenge some. It was noticeable that the level of English improved on questions where students were confident about the topic, particularly question 04.5. A number of schools and colleges applied for students with very poor handwriting to use a computer to word process their answers. This was beneficial to students as they were able to communicate more clearly the knowledge and understanding that they possessed.

## Question 01: Creation

### Question 01.1

In Question 01.1, most students knew the meaning of ‘sanctity of life’. Key terms are important and the one-mark multiple choice questions provide a good opportunity to test their meaning.

### Question 01.2

Students who knew what was meant by ‘types of writing (literary forms)’ answered 01.2 well and gained two marks. The specification refers to ‘key literary forms’. Weaker responses confused types of writing with the structure of the Bible itself and incorrectly said ‘Old Testament’ and ‘New Testament’ or just named books such as Genesis or Mark.

### Question 01.3

In Question 01.3, the stronger responses came from those who used two different art works that showed the creation. The most popular examples included Michelangelo, Meière and Wang. Those who explained the different emphases of the images gained full marks. Some tried unsuccessfully to use ‘The Last Judgement’, but the question required contrasting Christian beliefs specifically about creation. Some students misread the question and tried to explain how each artwork contradicted the accounts of creation in Genesis. Others only referred to one art work which limited the number of marks that could be awarded, no matter how well developed their answer.

**Question 01.4**

In Question 01.4, two ways in which Christians might carry out their duty as stewards were explained in some detail by many and included reference to the Bible or to Church documents. Some answers just said 'to care for the world' and lacked any specific ways in which this should be done, while others were vague on what stewardship involved and suggested that Christians 'spread God's word' without linking this to any actions that demonstrated stewardship. Other responses limited the credit which could be awarded as they explained why Christians should be stewards rather than saying what they might do to carry out this duty.

**Question 01.5**

The strongest responses were those which argued that, if taken literally, the Genesis creation stories did contradict scientific explanations, and went on to give details of those contradictions from science and from the Biblical accounts. They then argued that the Genesis creation accounts, if taken as myth, provided a religious explanation that could be validly held alongside science. Pope Francis' statement that the Big Bang does not contradict the divine act of creating, but rather requires it, was usefully quoted in support. Responses which failed to gain marks struggled with the word 'contradict'. These responses just argued for or against a belief in either science or Genesis and did not focus on whether or not the different accounts were contradictory. Most said that they were, so were limited to Level 2 as they could not provide a different point of view. Although this is a religious studies examination, the scientific knowledge displayed in quite a few responses was not encouraging. It was disappointing to read some very inaccurate explanations of the Big Bang, and some responses incorrectly argued that Eve's creation from Adam's rib was scientifically acceptable because men have fewer ribs than women.

**Question 02: Incarnation****Question 02.1**

In Question 02.1, most answered well, although some were less secure in their knowledge of 'Son of Man' as a title of Jesus when referring to his suffering.

**Question 02.2**

In Question 02.2, most knew some Christian symbols, the most popular being alpha and omega, ichthus (fish), and the cross and crucifix. Unfortunately the spelling of 'ichthus' was at times too wide of the mark to be credited as it was not clear that the term was actually known. A few responses only provided drawings of the symbols but could not be credited since the question asked them to 'name' two symbols.

**Question 02.3**

In Question 02.3, there were some excellent responses from students who knew the Parable of the Sheep and Goats and could explain specific ways in which it influenced Christian responses to those in need, for example by feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners and the sick, welcoming strangers, etc. Many who did not know the parable guessed that Christians would 'help' others in need and wrote generally about loving one's neighbour but unless they showed some knowledge of the Sheep and Goats parable, the marks which could be awarded were limited. Some focussed on the sheep being good and the goats bad with the outcomes for eternal life or damnation but did

not say how this influenced the response to those in need. These responses usually gained only two of the four marks available. Still others mixed this parable up with that of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Lost Sheep or the Good Samaritan and this limited their marks.

#### **Question 02.4**

In Question 02.4, the strongest responses focussed either on two different pieces of religious art, the most popular being the Sacred Heart picture and Christ the Redeemer statue, or on the same piece of religious art, but describing two different beliefs about Jesus that it expressed. Some responses limited the marks which could be awarded by explaining only one way rather than two ways that religious art expresses beliefs about Jesus, or by failing to refer to scripture or a source of Christian belief and teaching. It was not necessary to provide a direct quotation from scripture or tradition, so credit was given for beliefs and teachings that supported the interpretation of the art work. Some helpfully said, '...as it says in the Bible' to reinforce the idea that they were including a source of authority. Some responses limited the marks which could be awarded by saying that Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' showed Jesus being brought to life, while others wrote generally about beliefs about God rather than Jesus per se, as the question required.

#### **Question 02.5**

Some excellent responses were evident from those who argued that some Christian denominations do not practise all or any of the sacraments and live perfectly good Christian lives, that morality is more important than rituals, and that not all sacraments are available to women, for example. However, they argued, the sacraments brought spiritual benefits to those who received them; and the strongest responses went on to mention in detail what specific sacraments did to support Christian life today. Weaker responses focussed on whether or not sacraments needed 'updating' because they were not 'modern' or because 'times have changed' since their institution, but these answers did not sufficiently demonstrate the detailed reasons needed to achieve higher levels. Other students appeared to not know what 'sacraments' were. A number thought they were 'commandments' and discussed rules that they believed were no longer needed for Christian life. Some thought they applied to a time before Jesus. Others took a secular perspective and argued that sacraments were no longer practised by people, particularly atheists. For example, they argued that marriage was no longer needed because people cohabit or get divorced easily. However, these responses were not credited here because the question asked whether sacraments were needed for Christian life, not secular life. One might have argued that the sacrament of marriage was even more needed today for those very reasons.

### **Question 03: Church and the Kingdom of God**

#### **Question 03.1**

This was well answered as most understood that discipleship meant following Jesus.

#### **Question 03.2**

Most students could think of two reasons why Catholics might go on a pilgrimage. Popular answers included to strengthen faith or one's spiritual life and to be healed physically or spiritually.

**Question 03.3**

Students appeared to find this question more challenging. The strongest responses came from those who knew the *Magnificat*. They said that it could be seen as a prayer that demonstrated Mary's humility and discipleship in accepting God's will for her, or in contrast, as a prayer that was seen by some as fostering revolution with the rich and powerful being brought down and the poor raised up. However in weaker responses the *Magnificat* was not well known. Some thought it was the Lord's Prayer; and although others knew it was a prayer Mary said when she discovered she was pregnant, they did not go on to explain different interpretations of the prayer or see its link to the Kingdom of God, as in the specification. Many students left this question blank.

**Question 03.4**

Similarly, students appeared to find the key themes of the documents from the Second Vatican Council challenging. Quite a few did not even attempt an answer, and some who did, clearly did not know the documents. Some mixed up the themes from these documents with previous Councils' decisions or attributed them to Pope Francis. Although the question asked for 'themes', some credit was given if responses mentioned two things that changed in the Church after the Council, as long as they were mentioned in the documents. The most popular answers tended to be about changes in the liturgy from Latin to the local language, and the priest facing the people at Mass. Some very good answers came from those who described the theme of modernisation in *Gaudium et Spes* which saw the Church look outward regarding modern social issues of injustice and poverty, and the importance and non-literal interpretation of scripture encouraged by *Dei Verbum*.

**Question 03.5**

Here the strongest answers focussed on the importance of the role of the priest in Catholicism, while examining the importance of other vocations such as religious life or family life. Many said that a vocation was a calling from God, so whatever one was called to do was equally important if it promoted Kingdom values. Examples of doctors, nurses, police and fire services, etc. were cited as important for the wider society. Quite a number validly argued that priesthood, while important, could not be the most important because women were not allowed to be called to that vocation. Unfortunately weaker responses were unsure what a vocation was: some thought it was a sacrament or a ritual, some misread it as 'vacation' and others argued that going on a pilgrimage was more important than the vocation to priesthood. Others thought it just meant a 'job' so argued that the Pope was more important than a priest. However, these responses were not credited because the Pope is a priest, so is not following a different vocation, but just has a different role in the Church's hierarchy. One can't be 'called' to be Pope or choose it as a vocation.

**Question 4: Eschatology****Question 04.1**

The term 'purgatory' was reasonably well known but quite a few chose C (a place where souls go after the final judgement) rather than D (a state of cleansing to remove the effects of sin).

**Question 04.2**

Most students could give two ideas about life after death in 'The Last Judgement', eg heaven and hell. The painting does not show purgatory, so that response was incorrect.

**Question 04.3**

In this question, most students could give at least simple ways in which a belief in life after death might affect the way Christians live their lives, for example 'be good so that you go to heaven' or 'avoid sin so you don't go to hell'. Stronger answers tried to explain how the belief would relate to a particular behaviour. For example, the response, 'A Christian would help those in need by donating to charity so that they would not suffer for all eternity in hell' gained two marks.

**Question 04.4**

Many students appeared to find this question challenging. The question targeted the statement on page 15 of the specification, 'Identification and understanding of 'the last rites' as sacramental expression of reconciliation, healing and hope.' A number of students appeared not to know what 'the last rites' were and mistakenly wrote about the funeral service or the last judgement. Those who did know tended to focus on the last confession as an expression of reconciliation but could not then think of a second way in which the Sacrament of the Sick might bring reconciliation. The strongest responses were from those who, in addition to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, also talked about blessing with holy water to recall baptism's cleansing from sin, or receiving Christ in Holy Communion which strengthens the person on their journey to God and reconciles them with God and with their situation. Very few answers referred to scripture but many gained the fifth mark for citing the words of a prayer or blessing from the service ('I absolve you from your sins...').

**Question 04.5**

This was perhaps the strongest answered essay question. Most could give convincing arguments that 'euthanasia is always wrong' based on the sanctity of life and seeing euthanasia as murder so against the commandments. Many could also give arguments for allowing euthanasia to take place in certain circumstances, and used the concepts of free will, human dignity, compassion and love of neighbour to support the right to die. The strongest responses gave detailed explanations of when euthanasia might be considered and when it might be justifiable or not. Those who failed to gain marks kept their arguments vague. Some of the examples they gave were not euthanasia but rather the withdrawal of medication when the person would have no real benefit from it, an example that is actually accepted by the Church. Some confused euthanasia with abortion and wrote about the rights of the unborn. Given that it was the last question on the paper, it was pleasing to see so many students write well-argued responses with reference to religious perspectives about this topic.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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