
GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

Paper 2A Perspectives on faith (themes)
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

It was clear from the sound performance of many students that schools and colleges had prepared them well for this examination, both in the content taught and in the style of the examination questions. The insight and maturity of thought seen in some of the answers were impressive.

One major weakness was that students did not understand specialist terms, eg cohabitation, nuclear deterrence and conflict resolution. Theme B proved to be a particular problem in this respect, and that might explain why many students answered, in error, all three questions, using teachings and ideas studied as part of Paper 1 to help them with Theme C. This specification includes a number of technical terms which need to be learned. It is essential that the whole specification is covered so that students are able to attempt all questions.

Another weakness was that many students failed to note the requirement to refer to Christian beliefs or views in the 4 mark questions. All that is required is an indication of a Christian view, either by saying 'some Christians believe that...' or by giving a Christian teaching, but it is required so a response can access all the marks available.

A third weakness was that students did not always read questions with sufficient care. This meant that some very detailed responses gained little or no credit, because they were in effect answering a different question from the one set.

It is advised that schools and colleges continue to work on the techniques for answering questions. Often, answers to 4 and 5 mark questions consisted of one long paragraph. Examiners had to see if two beliefs or views could be distinguished, but this was not always possible. To reach Level 4 in the 12 mark questions, students need to ensure that the AO1 material is supporting the evaluation rather than being the main focus of the response.

Theme A: Religion, relationships and families

Question 01.1

95% of students answered this correctly.

Question 01.2

Nearly all students gained at least 1 of the 2 marks available and the vast majority gained both. The vows made at marriage were well known.

Question 01.3

A small minority of students who answered the rest of Theme A did not attempt this question and many students who did answer appeared to not understand the term 'cohabitation'. Some answers gave only one view and a few students did not note the requirement to refer to a Christian belief.

Question 01.4

John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* has not formed part of a previous specification but in many cases it had clearly been well taught. The responses of many students showed how well they had been prepared. Just under two thirds of students gained at least 3 marks, and of those, just under a third were awarded full marks. The insight revealed in many answers was impressive and teachers are to be congratulated on their success in communicating this element of the specification.

Question 01.5

There were some very mature evaluative responses to this question. The Catholic viewpoint was well known and the reasoning behind it was often clearly explained. The other side of the debate was clearly understood and generally reasoned. Just over a quarter of responses were awarded a Level 4 mark. It was a pity, though, that some students failed to read the question carefully and attempted to assess whether or not artificial contraception was outdated. A minority confused artificial contraception with fertility treatment.

Theme B: Religion, peace and conflict**Question 02.1**

This was the least successfully answered of the three multi-choice questions, but nevertheless almost 89% did give the correct response.

Question 02.2

This was a very straightforward question, almost all giving two creditworthy reasons. Responses which gained only one mark often made the same point twice.

Question 02.3

Those students who noted the requirement to refer to a Christian view and who focused on the question asked gained full marks with ease. The question related to beliefs about nuclear deterrence rather than to beliefs about nuclear weapons generally. Up to half marks could be gained for explaining one contrasting belief about the use of such weapons, on the grounds that part of the argument against possession of nuclear weapons as a deterrent is the danger that they will be used, but for full marks, the issue of deterrence needed to be addressed. Some responses explained the value of governments having a nuclear deterrent as a form of protection. Others explained the costliness of having and maintaining such weapons when the money could be spent on saving life rather than on potentially destroying it. Many included Christian teaching, usually when giving the belief that having a nuclear weapon as deterrence was wrong. Other answers appeared to be entirely secular, but by stating that one Christian belief was that nuclear deterrence was right or wrong, credit could be given, provided that the subsequent explanation was in keeping with Christian views.

Question 02.4

This question was not well answered. Many students referred to New Testament teaching, and in particular that of Jesus, or to the Crusades or Just War theory. A quarter of responses gained no marks or did not attempt this question. The specification does require students to know Old Testament biblical perspectives on war. It was possible to give two views that supported or opposed war, or to give one view on each side. Some wrote about holy war, as found in some Old Testament texts, giving the Exodus event or the battle of Jericho as an example of this. Others explained the acceptance of war when it was a matter of survival. Yet others referred to teaching that implied warfare was wrong. Those who had studied the topic of the Messiah in Judaism might have used Isaiah's vision of global peace here.

Question 02.5

This was the least successfully answered question on the paper. The impression received by examiners was that some students were not familiar with the term 'conflict resolution'. This is part of the specification, appearing twice in Dialogue 4. Those students who did understand the term were generally able to give and explain two viewpoints and there were some thoughtful evaluations in the strongest responses. A number of responses illustrated the discussion with reference to the work undertaken by Pope Francis. Some ignored the word 'resolution' and argued for and against conflict being the best way to prevent terrorism. Others interpreted the phrase as 'resolution by conflict'. In both cases, the credit that could be given was limited.

Theme C: Religion, human rights and social justice**Question 03.1**

Most students answered this correctly.

Question 03.2

This should have been a very straightforward question and nearly three quarters of responses gained both marks. Some responses, however, did not read the question with sufficient care, giving two Catholic teachings about human rights. Others gave the same right twice.

Question 03.3

The majority of responses gained at least three marks. There was a wide range of answers. Explanation of secular beliefs often centred around the idea that people had the right to keep for their own use what they had gained through hard work. Others wrote about capitalism and materialism. Christian responses often linked to the concept of stewardship of wealth; others considered the call to live simply, whether in secular society or in a monastic community. Contrasting views did not need to be opposing views, but they did have to be different and some students gave only one view. Other responses limited the marks that could be awarded through not referring to a Christian view, as required by the question.

Question 03.4

This question was answered very successfully, with just over two fifths of responses gaining full marks. The parables of the rich man and Lazarus and of the Good Samaritan were often effectively applied to the question. It was good to see application of the preferential option for the poor and of other 20th and 21st century Catholic teaching. Responses which limited the number of marks which could be awarded generally did so because they explained only one belief.

Question 03.5

Many students answered this at length, but just under two fifths gained eight marks or more. This was because they often found it hard to give an alternative viewpoint that could be seen as discrimination. Those responses that did reach the top of Level 3 or Level 4 tended to consider positive discrimination, eg in the workplace or in society. Others discussed the status of women in the Church and the biblical views that might imply gender discrimination. It was pleasing to see the perceptive understanding of a range of biblical teachings demonstrated by a wide range of responses.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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