

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

GCE Religious Studies – Investigations
(6RS02)

Paper 1F The Study of the New Testament

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UNIT 2: Religious studies - Investigations

Introduction

General Comments

This unit provides for a balance of teacher-directed and more independent student enquiry. This 'Investigations' unit offers the opportunity to undertake individual research into a topic of particular interest to the candidates. This is the reason why each question includes the expression, "with reference to the topic you have investigated". The ability to select and manage individual research material to fit into the demands of the question is an important discriminator in terms of assessment.

It is for this reason that the mark scheme for this unit is a generic one. There are no indicative mark schemes per question given the fact that there are so many legitimate ways of answering questions based on independent research.

The two assessment objectives should permeate this whole process. Candidates should determine whether there is sufficient material to access a variety of appropriate sources (AO1) and to evaluate alternative views (AO2). Candidates may monitor their progress with reference to the criteria in the level descriptors across both AO1 and AO2. The assessment criteria are always mentioned in each question. Typically this is achieved with the trigger words, 'examine' for AO1 and 'comment on' for AO2. The assessment of the candidates work is based on the application of these objectives.

Some candidates performed well on this unit. It was clear that some candidates had selected topics of genuine interest to them. There was evidence of substantial background reading which was used effectively in answers. Candidates presented well-structured responses based on the question and were able to use their knowledge to address the focus of the question. A feature of high quality answers was the ability to relate to the question throughout the answer. Candidates performed well across both assessment objectives with detailed content and cogent argument.

Some candidates did not select their material in accordance with the specific question. Some candidates could have adapted their same material so as to use it more effectively to address the question. In some cases the question was only briefly mentioned and in others there was limited reference to the question in the final few sentences. Some responses at the lower levels drew on sources that were below the standard required at GCE level. These tended to be descriptive and more narrative rather than analytical. Some responses at the lower levels were short and lacked elaboration and the substantiation necessary at this level.

Some centres chose to concentrate on the same topic for a number of candidates. This was useful when backed up with relevant sources, whereby candidates could develop their own slant and specialism on their selected topics. Occasionally, some responses became formulaic without targeted attention to the demands of the specific question. A key aim of this unit is to involve candidates as active participants in order to provide possibilities for open-ended enquiry and independent learning.

It is essential that candidates are entered for the area of investigation which is the best fit for the question on the paper. Candidates were not penalised if a cross was placed in a box that did not match the response.

Specific Comments – AREA 1F – The study of the New Testament

6RS02_1F_Q01 – Religion and Science

Question Introduction

Good answers did more than gloss over the scientific arguments and were more than textual narrative.

Exemplar 1

This is the first part of an answer on the topic of religion and science as a New Testament study. The exemplar selected concerns miracles.

Examiner Comment

The candidate poses some of the major issues around this topic at the beginning of the answer. The first theme is whether or not there are alternative explanations to the occurrence of miracles rather than claiming they are 'acts of God'.

The tension between science and religion is a relatively recent phenomenon. During the 18th century, scientists such as Darwin began to postulate that much of what had thought to have been miracles, e.g. 'the origin of life' could have an alternate explanation. The New Testament is full of accounts of miracles often involving a healing or nature disturbance, such as when Jesus walked on water or when Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead. Richard Swinburne defined a miracle as 'a violation or suspension of natural laws, brought about by God'. Modern science has begun to question the reliability of the miracles in the New Testament due to a number of factors such as the New Testament being 2000 years old and the reliability of the witnesses. 'There is not to be found any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men of high unquestionable good sense, education and learning, as to be true or regard all delusions' (David Hume - of miracles). I feel that scientific discoveries do make a useful contribution in helping us understand teachings of the New Testament such as miracles.

Some scientists attempt to reverse this claim by appealing to the laws of nature, by putting forward all the religious language and by providing an alternate explanation. Scientists such as Hawking, Dawkins and Atkins believe they can provide a better explanation for the way

the world works as NT teachings such as miracles, then religion can. Peter Atkins stated 'There is a sharp contrast between the impossible parts of the theological conclusion, which it logically precludes holding fast, from the sharp limited explanations of science'. Here P. Atkins is trying to point the 'middle' of theology by explaining it is all a delusion based on pure John was divine and his teachings of miracles were true. However as a Christian, I would counter this by referring to the quote in the New Testament of Jesus walking on water in Matthew 14:31, where he asks us to have faith in him in order to understand him.

The scientific view is that it can only be true if it can be proved in a scientific manner, for example miracles such as Jesus walking on water, undermine our understanding of the way the world works. P. Atkins quoted 'everything can be explained in terms of physical science' and 'humanity should accept that science has eliminated the justification for cosmic purpose'. Keith Ward backs this point and also observes, using God as the explanation for everything, is the 'terminus' or end of the quest for intelligibility, a rational complete explanation for events'. However I feel that physical science struggles to provide a coherent explanation for certain bits of love and human values such as loyalty. Religious people explain that it is God that provides the explanation for everything and would refer to the quote 'with man there is limitation, but with God all things are possible' (Mark 9:23).

Some scientists believe they should not have to prove New Testament

teachings such as Michelangelo's, and it is up to the people who claim them to be true to do. This is a lesson of behind Russia's cosmic temper the philosopher Gordon of put has on those who make unfalsifiable claims, not on those who reject them. 'No one can dispute but there is not between earth and man a temper in itself, but no one would say difficulty, likely to be taken into account in practice, I trust the Christian God just unliking' (Thomas Russell). However I feel the various NT teachings and events should not be taken off their 'highly'.

Examiner Tip

The candidate selects a good range of scholarly contributions to this issue in order to clarify the significance of this stance and its debating points.

6RS02_1F_Q02 – New Testament ethics and morality

Question Introduction

Candidates chose to discuss either marriage or homosexuality. Good answers highlighted the religious, moral and cultural importance of New Testament teachings. Arguments centred on the relevance, with interesting references to real-life examples. A number incorporated psychological approaches and these answers were interesting and often well-developed.

Candidates mentioned differing viewpoints and more could have been made of issues linking New Testament and life today. Nearly all successfully offered a range of textual material, though links were sometimes tenuous.

6RS02_1F_Q03 – Life after death

Question Introduction

This was by far the most popular option. Good answers offered effective reference to biblical and religious texts, religious traditions and theories about the nature of life and death. There were interesting views on the Genesis account of life, the kingdom of God and the 'imitation of Christ'. Aquinas featured prominently, along with discussions on free will, determinism and

aspects of spirituality. Good answers did not concentrate solely on the question of whether or not the resurrection really happened and moved beyond narrative.

Exemplar 2

These are the concluding two pages of an answer on life after death and the New Testament.

Examiner Comment

The candidate briefly considers some philosophical critics of the notion of life after death. The essay ends with a summary of the various points made throughout the answer with a clear line of reasoning.

Gilbert Ryle adds to the criticisms and describes the Resurrection as a "category error" to speak of the soul. He is then supported by Hagee who says the body is a "single entity" not one of spirituality and physicality. These claims are also supported by science where mental actions are viewed as physical actions. Anthony Flew claims that life after death isn't a meaningful concept to life and argues that the notion of life after death is incoherent because death and life are two mutually exclusive categories. In a plane crash there are those who die and those who survive, no one who "survived death".

It is evident that the New Testament provides crucial strong evidence to life after death and in some cases it could be argued that it provides the

most reliable evidence in terms of an afterlife. The New Testament is of crucial importance to give people hope of understanding life after death because without it people would be left wondering if there is such a thing as post-mortem existence. However the ~~word~~ New Testament has come under a great strain of criticisms from philosophers such as LeWilson, El Sanders and Moltmann all who questioned its validity. As I have suggested, like Wright concluded, nothing explains life after death and the Resurrection of Jesus so "naturally, completely and satisfyingly" as the New Testament.

Advice for candidates:

- Manage the material from the investigations to focus on the demands of the question
- Use appropriate sources
- Show an understanding of the topic
- Present a thoughtful analysis of the material
- Make effective use of evidence and argument
- Comment on alternative views
- Show a clearly expressed viewpoint.

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