

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCE in Religious
Studies (6RS02) Paper 1F

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AREA 1F New Testament

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

Expressing annual praise for the quality of candidates' work is a delight because, once again, the Investigations Paper evoked excellent studies drawn from an inspiring range of topics within a wide range of varied academic fields. The high standard of work evidenced in June 2014 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a very high level of independent enquiry which clearly demonstrated engagement with their chosen area of investigation. Candidates showcased their knowledge of a particular academic field in the way they identified a line of enquiry, clearly expressed their view, analysed key concepts and deployed evidence with coherent understanding of their task whilst fluently evaluating a wide range of source material that they had at their disposal. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres continue to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. Candidates were very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that Centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. It is important to stress again that the 'Investigations' unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve students as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning. Questions were designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and all valid answers were considered.

Whilst most centres had entered their candidates for the correct option there were still a few entries for particular Areas of Study where consideration regarding entry for a different Area of Study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which area of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper. There was evidence of candidates choosing a different question on the paper to the question they had clearly prepared for before the examination. In some of these cases the candidate was using material suitable for Question 1 to answer Question 3 (or vice versa) and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. This practice does not always work to the best effect as the candidate might end up answering neither question as fully as possible. It must be noted that each question was written for ONE of three topics within each particular Area of Study. Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer or if no box was ticked at all. However, evidence shows that candidates have decided that the question for a topic that they clearly had not prepared for looked more inviting and selected that question but that did not necessarily mean they were best prepared to answer that question. More candidates in this session answered a question they had not prepared for and may need to be reminded which question their material is best directed at and be advised to answer that question. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. Centres should ensure that candidates are entered for the option that matches their Area of Study and that candidates are clear about which question they have been prepared for on the paper. There is still evidence of Centres studying Papers 1B and 1F being entered for 1A. This might be an oversight regarding filling out the form – Centres must choose 6RS02 and then identify which of the seven papers from 1A to 1G is the specific entry.

Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Importantly there must be explicit attention to both objectives in the examination answer and also to the question that is intended to focus the answer. Each question consistently referred to the assessment objectives with the trigger word 'Examine' for AO1 and 'Comment on' for AO2. These dictated the structure of the question and helped candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations. The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' will always appear in the question to ensure that the generic question can be answered with material from any appropriate investigation. The mark scheme itself is generic to all questions but the answer itself is not necessarily generic as candidates are expected to use their material to answer the question. The purpose of the question is to challenge candidates to adapt their material so that at the highest levels they may demonstrate a coherent understanding of the task based on the selection of their material. Widely deployed evidence/arguments/sources were evident in well structured responses to the task whereby a clearly expressed viewpoint was supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument. There was skilful deployment of religious language in many answers and the fluency of good essays showed command over the material; such command makes for high outcomes and rewards the amount of hard work done by the candidate. Many candidates had clearly learned much in the process and their overall grasp of the issues involved and command over their material was highly commendable.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. In preparation for this examination some candidates may find it useful to write up their investigation under exam timed conditions to a variety of different possible questions. They might build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of material such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. However, success can be undermined by writing up a rote-learned answer which was not adapted to the question set or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied. There was evidence of rote learned answers using the same structure and material inclusive of quotes; whilst much information was relevant to the topic and consequently was awarded in terms of AO1, there was a significant lack of engagement with the specific demands of the question and consequently marks for AO2 were low, with only generic evaluation provided. This approach is contrasted with another form where candidates were trained to answer the question; arguably, this is evidence of good practice but at the lower end some candidates thought it was sufficient to simply use the question stimulus at the end of each paragraph. The best answers were those which were guided by the statement as opposed to simply '*tagging it on*' to content that they were already anticipating to write about. A balanced approach to the question that meets the highest levels of achievement according to both assessment objectives is obviously desirable and the generic question accommodates many possible routes to success whereby any valid approach to the question was credited.

Finally, there is increasing evidence of poorly written scripts that are almost illegible – scripts are scanned onto software for marking and even though the examiner can enlarge the screen many scripts were still very difficult to read. Candidates are strongly advised to develop their practical handwriting skills and then practice writing under timed conditions. Candidates who cannot achieve legible writing may need to consider accessing the facility for word processing their answers according to the regulations. Centres are assured that much time was invested in attempting to decipher illegible answers but there is always the risk that a badly written word/phrase/paragraph could be misinterpreted and it is best to avoid the chances of this occurring. Examiners understand the time constraints that candidates are

writing under but this problem regarding illegible handwriting seems to be on the increase. Centres need to address this issue because the current format for examinations requires candidates' ability to sustain handwriting and academic standards under examination pressure.

That said, the excellent work of centres and candidates in 6RS02 bears testimony to the academic potential of candidates that is a joy to behold when it is fully realised.

Specific Comments – Area 1F – The Study of the New Testament

The overall standard of the responses to these questions were scholarly and consistent with the performance of previous sittings. Candidates once again drew on a range of interesting material.

Question 1 Religion and Science

The low number of candidates who answer this question means that there does not seem to be evidence of new approaches to the question therefore much of the comments below may seem to have been said before but are repeated for the sake of overcoming perennial issues.

Candidates are reluctant to discuss with confidence how the study of the interface between religion and science might have real relevance for the study of the New Testament. There is scope for examining the historical interaction between religion and science by focussing on the dialogue between Christianity and the natural sciences. The New Testament provides rich material for the application of natural science, for example, miracle narratives and eschatology. Very few candidates addressed, for example, how divine intervention in the New Testament could be interpreted by examining the possibilities for scientific explanations such as emergentist theory. Most candidates concentrated on the Hume's response to miracles, with varying success and the views of Dawkins were ever-present; candidates focussing on Hume often omitted aspects of Hume's critique that is largely scientific such as cause and effect, the principle of evidence and the laws of nature. It is a shame that studies on Divine Intervention from the last ten years have still not been accessed by many candidates because these provide more material for candidates to draw upon.

The question provided wide scope for discussing whether scientific advances are only an apparent threat to an understanding of New Testament teachings if the New Testament has not been understood correctly; the best candidates handled this question very well and skilfully navigated through their material to answer the question with conviction. There are many different ways of approaching the question such as examining Models for the relationship of religion and science and commenting on how far these models can allow for divine activity found in the New Testament. Models of God can, in varying degrees, allow for scientific explanations of New Testament narrative. It is a shame that the take up for this question remains low as the potential of this area of study remain largely unexplored.

Finally candidates who presented academic answers to this question are to be commended for how well-versed they were on the New Testament and related philosophical issues. Successful responses had a solid grasp of New Testament scholarship and how this related to the religion and science debate. At the top end, many answers were excellent and received very high marks. There was a clear and

detailed understanding of the issues and of the religious and theological meanings behind them. Candidates referred to a range of scholars, both ancient and modern, and attempted a detailed theological discussion that was firmly contextually situated within the religion and science relationship. There was proficient use and understanding of complex theological ideas such as 'salvation' and the use of New Testament symbolism was impressive. Clearly the best candidates were very well prepared and had achieved a very wide range of knowledge of relevant scholarship. In the lower ranges of responses candidates were comfortable with material from either religion or science but had some difficulty in relating both.

Question 2 New Testament Ethics and Morality

At the top end, the answers to this question were really excellent, offering detailed ethical analysis of New Testament teachings, coupled with a range of useful scholarship and proficient use of religious language.

However, in the mid-range, many concentrated a little too heavily on Situation Ethics and Natural Moral Law at the expense of New Testament exegesis. Answers tended to rely mostly on ethical theory, with New Testament material added as something of an after-thought. Greater parity between the New Testament and Ethics content within such responses would raise achievement. There was also evidence of an essay structure which meant that candidates were devoting a significant part of their essay to the Old Testament at the expense of New Testament exemplification. This area of study is explicitly focussed on the New Testament and not the Old Testament; the study of the Old Testament is already offered in another unit (6RS02/1E). The study of the New Testament already suggests a different focus and in the time allowed candidates might depress their achievement if they try to focus on both the Old and New Testaments in their response. That said, it is completely valid to use the Old Testament to root New Testament teachings but candidates are to be reminded that this approach calls for precision and awareness of the New Testament context within which they are writing.

At the lower-end, a number of students concentrated on a GCSE-style analysis of marriage, abortion and homosexuality, lacking any real depth of discussion or scholarship. Once again, as noted last year, it must be stressed that some topics share generic ideas across a number of different areas and it is vital that candidates know the **distinctive** features of their investigation for example; there can be overlap with topics addressed in Area 1C and candidates who focussed more on classical ethical theory rather than New Testament ethics might have used the material they investigated more effectively in Area 1C. The same point also applies to the distinctive focus that is required by either a Study of the Old Testament or the New Testament. This reminder has been offered last year but still seems to present a problem for a significant number of weaker candidates albeit possibly to a lesser number of candidates.

Question 3 Life After Death

This question attracts a very high level of interest in and enthusiasm for the one question that arguably can only be a matter for speculation during our lifetime. This is by far the most popular question and attracts many excellent responses at the top end with a clear and concise analysis of New Testament teachings, coupled with philosophical debate. The range of scholarship and textual analysis was impressive and candidates were comfortable with handling their material to answer the question.

In the mid-range there is still too much emphasis on philosophical arguments about life after death, with the New Testament used as an after-thought. Also, many concentrated solely on Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 15 or on the dilemma of the empty tomb, but lacked the depth of detail and scholarship required for the highest

marks. Some candidates were less comfortable with New Testament theology and tended to concentrate on confining themselves to re-writing the textual narrative without developing further ideas from it; others linked philosophical ideas at a basic level or made little reference to the New Testament. Quite a number missed the real meaning of the question and concentrated on tangential issues. A problem regarding the use of biblical material still persists and the point made for question 2 applies to this question also: weaker candidates writing a few pages on Old Testament roots for beliefs regarding Life after Death could have made more effective use of their time by ensuring that the significance of this material for New Testament teachings was clearly drawn out. Whilst Old Testament teachings are acknowledged as relevant material, candidates must link this material explicitly to their study of the New Testament. It must be noted that whilst this problem still persists a far greater number of candidates made a much better job of placing any reference to the Old Testament into context. Candidates were not marked down for this approach but credited for how they used this material within a study of the New Testament if they managed to make it clear why Old Testament narratives and quotes were essential to their argument. This question evidenced the greatest disparity amongst responses which ranged from candidates being very well prepared to others having difficulty with answering the question.

One final point that still needs addressing by some centres: there was still evidence of candidates, presumably from the same centre, presenting a wide range of material organised within a recognisable structure, illustrated by the same quotes and scholars. Some of these candidates struggled to adapt their learned material to the demands of the question. It is also questionable how far candidates had engaged with independent research as they wrote essays that were similar in style with some paragraphs word for word. A02 achievement is upwardly levelled by this practice if candidates fail to comment on their material with the question in mind. It is not enough to tag on the question at the end of the section by arguing that this material shows 'x' if they cannot explain why this is the case.

All of the above is intended to signpost perennial issues across all questions. It is fair to say that there is evidence that an increasing number of centres have already taken this on board and subsequently the achievement of their candidates is highly commendable.

Paper Summary

Key Points to Remember

- Do not ignore the question.
- A generic question is not best answered with a generic answer. The question is made up of two parts. The question itself and the generic phrase 'Examine and comment with reference to the topic you have investigated.' Answer the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Well deployed material will show how well you understand your topic and how you are using your material to answer the question.
- Do not forget to comment on your material in relation to the question.
- Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.
- Comment on alternative views if you know them.
- Express your viewpoint clearly.
- Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation.
- Do not spend too much time on your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.
- Write legibly.

