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Examiners' Report

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In Religious Studies (9RS0)

Paper 3

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## Introduction

The 2024 sitting of the GCE Religious Studies 9RS0\_03 specification was another successful year with some excellent responses which clearly demonstrate the academic grasp of the subject and the fluency with which the most impressive responses demonstrated a love for the subject itself. Candidates revealed thorough knowledge and understanding across the whole paper and each year sees impressive links to other papers in Q04. The ability to address the specific demands of each question coupled with increased competency in addressing the synoptic link was apparent this year. At the highest-level candidates demonstrated a range of detailed and carefully deployed knowledge to deconstruct the question and offer a sustained, clearly expressed line of argument that deserved recognition for fully answering the question. There was extensive evidence of well-formed judgements supported by key textual knowledge; succinct well-placed quotes alongside subject specific vocabulary and appropriate scholarship which all contributed to analysis or evaluation of the issues related to the question and these aspects formed the hallmarks of the best responses.

Perennial issues of time management persist and greater awareness of how much each question is worth would help some candidates to manage their responses more effectively, for example Q1 is worth 8 marks and can be answered in the space provided rather than across three pages. This may not be an issue for some candidates but for others affected the quality of other responses to questions worth 30 marks. That said, it is encouraging to note that there were very few 'not attempted' responses overall.

There was evidence of material in the wrong place and more 'out of clip' responses. Centres need to be aware that questions are marked separately, and a plan written in space intended for the previous question means that the examiner will not see this initially. There is always the risk that a creditworthy point could be missed despite best efforts to retrieve and reassemble all parts of an answer. In addition to this, a greater number are continuing Q01 on extra paper when technically no more marks could be awarded beyond the available 8. In some cases, such time management impacted on Q03b) and Q04 and these questions are obviously worth more marks.

It is apparent that some candidates with illegible writing or indeed those who find writing onerous would be better advised to word process their examination. If this makes a difference in terms of how much can be presented in the time allowed, then alternative access arrangements could be explored by centres because they are available on application. Centre practice could also, in addition to time management training, remind candidates that the lack of a synoptic link in Q4 is a self-penalising aspect of achievement and limits available marks.

Key areas of advice proffered each year remain relevant: centres are reminded that the accurate use of any Gospel in a response is essential to address the question – this applies especially when the question is driven by specific reference to either the Fourth Gospel, synoptic gospels or the proof texts. There is no substitute for accurate awareness of the Gospels of Luke and John; for example, the 'I am' sayings appear only in John. The Good Samaritan parable is a core ethical teaching, but NOT found in all four Gospels. The Walking on Water sign is not found in Luke's Gospel. Guesswork does not earn marks, especially if the

wrong text is selected for a question that clearly states where the content is located. Some responses indicated that the Prologue was not in the Fourth Gospel, and this reinforces the need for sound subject knowledge and basic accuracy; it also reinforces the need to read the question carefully because there was no direct question on the Prologue on the paper this year. Whilst a wide range of material can be deployed to analyse or evaluate a topic, it is not solely effective to deploy such material instead of referring to material specified in the question.

In summary, clearly enthusiasm for Religious Studies A level remains unchanged, with candidates showing real enjoyment of the subject and a willingness to engage in discussion and evaluation. Centres had worked hard on preparing candidates for the specification areas and this was most notable in Question 4. Advice taken on board improves outcomes and this year the synoptic link was integral to the argument and much more than a superficial bolt-on. Overall, the most successful candidates produced impressive responses that evidenced sound learning, engagement with the subject matter and accurate knowledge of the textual content and relevant scholarship. 2024 was a successful year and candidates deserve the rewards they earned for thoroughgoing study of the New Testament.

### **Q01 Explore key ideas of the messianic secret.**

Candidates are expected to have accurate and precise knowledge of the messianic secret as a concept or literary device and are expected to explore the literary relationship of this concept within Mark's gospel.

Evidence within responses saw explorations of a wide range of key ideas about the messianic secret and included varied theological interpretations such as the timing of Jesus' request to 'tell no one', appropriate links to the suffering Messiah, and the question of wishing to avoid misinterpretation of a messianic claim. Some candidates covered Wrede's and Hooker's contribution in detail or a wider range of ideas with sufficient factual detail to earn A01 marks. Scholarly knowledge supported these responses and generally enriched the aspect of the topic being discussed.

It must be noted that full marks can be earned without scholarly reference but will be earned for accurate knowledge of the topic. There is no requirement to offer an opinion (A02). It is worth noting that Q1, an 'Explore' question, attracts 8 marks solely for A01. Information about the topic is required for full marks - there is no requirement to discuss or analyse. Q01 can also be an indicator of time management issues when more than necessary material for 8 marks is written onto extra paper. It is notable that some candidates who wrote two pages for Q01 often did not have time to write an extra page for the essay questions such as Q03a)/b) and Q04 which carried more marks.

Question 1 could not be answered through guess work and required the selection of sufficient material from the topic to address the question - there is no need to offer complete coverage of the topic to earn full marks - candidates must remember there are only 8 marks and adjust their response accordingly - this

exercise in time management will pay dividends in terms of time needed for longer questions.

### **Q02 Assess the significance of the work of Ian Wilson and Frank Morison for understanding the resurrection of Jesus.**

The question targeted very specific knowledge of the work of Ian Wilson and Frank Morison in relation to the question of understanding the resurrection of Jesus. Anything other than the works of these two scholars and/or relevant scholarly critique would not do. This topic is very well supported in literature and the specific scholarship of Wilson and Morison is an integral aspect of understanding the resurrection of Jesus.

Better candidates were able to demonstrate accurate knowledge of Wilson's and Morison's hypotheses regarding the veracity of the resurrection. The best responses could highlight the focus of the question, selected appropriate material from the resurrection narrative and accurately referenced the significance of the two scholars for understanding the resurrection. They were able to identify the historical investigative approach of Wilson and the scepticism of Morrison and assess the rational approach and ultimate conclusions reached by both scholars. There is no requisite to cover each view equally but most responses at this level offered a balanced assessment in reasonable depth.

The question required more than simply outlining the views of two different scholars and the best responses demonstrated detailed and accurate knowledge of the right scholarship and could differentiate between the work of Wilson and Morison. Weaker responses were confused and did not know the hypotheses of either scholar.

### **Q3a Clarify the ideas illustrated in the passage about the Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.**

Both the two-part essay Q03a/b and the extended essay Q04 represent a significant proportion of the marks for the whole paper and should be given sufficient time and attention. Candidates who spend too much time on Q01 and/or Q02 would be better advised to answer the essay questions first, whilst keeping an eye on timings, as cumulatively these two questions (Q03 and Q04) add up to 60 out of 80 marks.

Q03a) enables candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the anthology with specific reference to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Good candidates were able to correctly clarify elements of the passage and went beyond merely repeating it. A significant number of candidates identified a wide range of themes from the passage and clarified aspects of the passage by extrapolating very well-known themes to which the sign is pointing – some of these themes included: the foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection, Jesus' divine authority and power over

death, the relationship of Jesus with humanity, the faith of the witnesses, the glorification of God and the role of faith. The best responses included all of these and demonstrated very sound understanding of the passage. Knowing the context of the raising of Lazarus was essential for a full response and the best candidates did not disappoint.

At the lower range of response, it is worthwhile to remind centres of the purpose of the 'clarify' question because some candidates are missing out on marks for confining their response to a basic comprehension exercise, or for being at times vague and confused, or finally for imprecise knowledge of any aspect of the extract itself. Indeed, far too many missed salient aspects of the text and were content to paraphrase or regurgitate the extract. The question calls for taking some of the issues/themes in the extract, unpacking them and making them easier to understand. This can be done successfully by explaining a small snippet in more detail, illuminating a contextual layer or elucidating a concept. Familiarity with the Anthology beyond the extract obviously enabled the candidate to interpret the extract itself.

### **3b) Analyse the importance of the signs for understanding Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel.**

Candidates at the highest levels analysed why/how the signs play a crucial role in conveying the nature and purpose of Jesus' ministry - they discussed how signs serve as profound theological symbols and how they can be understood in several ways such as: a revelation of Jesus' divine nature, confirmation of Jesus' mission and leading people to faith and belief. Amongst the best answers there was evidence of detailed knowledge of a full range of signs and their specific theological significance for understanding Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel. Various discussions focussed on how the performance of signs attracted conflict and controversy and whether it possessed an eschatological dimension important for the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

The sign in the extract carried enormous eschatological significance in that it foreshadowed Jesus' resurrection and underscored his power over death. Weaker candidates missed that point and discussed signs that were not in the Fourth Gospel or repeated material used in Q03a).

Candidates were expected to know the signs in the Fourth Gospel.

Candidates seemed to perform equally well in both parts of the question. The length, depth, and breadth of answers to part (b) was impressive.

#### **Q04 Evaluate the claim that a futuristic view of the Kingdom of God in Luke's gospel is persuasive.**

The best candidates addressed this question by evaluating various views about the Kingdom of God, inclusive of Past, Present and Future views and were able to exemplify the response with relevant scholarship. Most addressed accurately Inaugurated Eschatology and argued a case for their favoured view. Reference to the parables for the Kingdom of God and various views of the kingdom of God was successfully applied to the question. All candidates correctly identified the realised eschatology of C.H.Dodd and some got the rest muddled up.

There were three main approaches taken by candidates; firstly, an approach which identified a view and its associated scholarship, secondly, an approach which addressed each view of the Kingdom of God without any reference to scholars and thirdly a textual approach which addressed each view through close reference to appropriate texts e.g. parables of the Kingdom of God. These three general approaches evidenced varied success in the response. Some weaker candidates were confused over which scholar represented a 'view' and muddled the discussion through inaccurate A01 that ultimately undermined their A02 evaluation to a degree.

Candidates were expected to distinguish between different views of the Kingdom of God and whilst it is not mandated to name scholarship the view itself must be accurately expressed and evaluated against the claim in the question. Knowledge of the meaning of a futuristic view of the Kingdom of God was accurate in the best responses.

A01 must be accurate and selected to illustrate material with extrapolation and discussion of its contribution to a specific view. A02 requires the claim regarding 'futuristic view of the Kingdom of God' to be evaluated against knowledge of the view itself and other different views. All valid conclusions are creditworthy provided they are justified. The best candidates really knew the topic and offered a very full response to the question. This was generally a well answered question with many candidates demonstrating secure understanding of accurate textual material and many candidates showed a good understanding of the topic.

Achievement was self-limiting by an insufficient or inaccurate overview of various teachings albeit with a tenuous link to any view about the Kingdom of God. Short answers to Q04 with an attached page for Q01 suggested, in some cases, that the candidate had not managed their timing successfully. A significant number of responses were self-penalising for not making synoptic links, and also for not answering the question.

On the other hand, there was an improvement in the handling of the demands of Q04 – the compulsory synoptic element of the question was done to a high standard by a significant number and some good responses drew on a range of detailed and carefully selected knowledge to deconstruct the issues in the question before offering a fully justified conclusion based on review and analysis/evaluation of material. Some excellent examples of well-crafted and pertinent links made

with other components studied, demonstrated that this aspect of the question can be done without a 'bolt-on' paragraph approach.

### **Paper Summary**

A very good year's work has been done by centres and candidates, in general equipping candidates to respond well to the demands of this paper. Candidates appear to enjoy the material they study and can respond with enthusiasm. Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Respond to the specific demands of the question by tailoring relevant information.
- Practice writing to timed practise questions using the exam timing.
- Use the answer booklet correctly and avoid unnecessary attachments.
- Be careful of time management and the number of available marks for Q1.
- Spend enough time on the questions that carry most marks.
- Support points made with examples and relevant textual detail.
- Express your viewpoint clearly where AO2 is required.
- Continue to develop a good range of scholarship.
- Take care with subject specific spellings (terminology and scholars).