

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit 4C Topic III *Ways of Reading and
Understanding Scripture*

Example of Candidate's Response



**GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION
ADVANCED LEVEL**



RELIGIOUS STUDIES UNIT 4C RST4C
Ways of Reading and Understanding Scripture

EXAMPLE OF CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE

For this paper you must have:

- a 12 page answer book.

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions

- Use black ink or ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book.
The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is **RST4C**.
- Choose **one Section** only.
- Answer **one** question.

Information

- The maximum mark for this paper is 75.
- The marks for questions are shown in brackets.
- In each question, part (a) tests your knowledge and understanding, while part (b) tests your skills of reasoning and evaluation.
- You will be marked on your ability to use English, to organise information clearly and to use specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

RST4C Topic III *Ways of Reading and Understanding Scripture*

1 (a) Examine the major types of scriptural scholarship in one religion.

(45 marks)

AO1

Candidate Response

I shall consider the major types of scriptural scholarship found in Christianity. More commonly referred to as biblical criticism begins at the end of the nineteenth century and has developed from there. Today the biblical criticism is divided into a number of different styles and approaches. Normally this is focused upon either the Old or the New Testament. Today most biblical scholars acknowledge the Old Testament to be Jewish scripture and thus should be dealt with in this context whereas the New Testament is seen to be specifically Christian.

A lot of work has been conducted upon the texts. Within this there are different styles of study, often called criticisms, redaction, textual, historical, tradition, form and grammatical and literary are the best known. All of these seek to find what might be regarded as the true message to be found in the scriptures recognising that as they stand even in their original, before translation, they cannot simply be read and taken at face value. Redaction criticism focuses upon how the text has got to the point it has got to, in most cases this is the text which was selected for inclusion in the canon of the Christian scriptures in this case both Old and New Testament. It is this approach which has led to the scholars considering that the four gospels are written in a particular order and that there may be other sources which one or other gospel relied upon. Thus the theory of the synoptic gospels runs that Mark was the first gospel to be written followed by either Matthew or Luke and that both of these drew from Mark quite heavily but equally both also drew from another source now called Q. Equally both Matthew and Luke also drew upon a tradition which is unique to them. Textual criticism thus considers the text itself and demonstrates that there are different texts which have variant readings, sometimes reflected in different versions of the Christian bible. Therefore biblical scholars suggest that with the bible we have at least four types of textual variants: variations amongst scripts written in the original language; variations among manuscripts in early translation; variations between the first two; and in the case of the Old Testament variations between Christian and Hebrew texts. Thus the Hebrew version of the book of Job is one-sixth longer than the Greek version, and the Greek version of the book of Jeremiah is one eighth shorter than the Hebrew version with material also appearing in a different order.

With Historical criticism there are two aspects to this, the history found recorded within the text and then the history of the text itself. This approach helps when we are looking at the book of Daniel. The events depicted in the text extend from the sixth to the second century BCE but we are now certain that the text was first written in the mid second century. To understand a passage from the book of Daniel one must therefore be familiar with these periods. In a similar way scholars often suggest that the books of Chronicles are best understood as re-presentations of the books of Kings but written from a different stand point. Tradition looks at the traditions which are reflected in the text arising from the societies from which the text arose. In the New Testament scholars suggest that if we look at I Corinthians 15 v1-11 it is suggested that verses 3-5 are Paul basing what he says upon an earlier Christian tradition which has a four part structure; Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared. This is not a formula used elsewhere by Paul and he also refers to that fact that it 'was delivered' to him.

Form criticism largely focuses upon the types or forms of material found in the text and there is also the 'Sitz im Leben', the life situation, which is concerned with the different forms and their contexts. The account of the healing of the mad man in the Gerasenes found in Mark 5 is firstly categorised as a healing miracle. Thus it can be compared to other similar accounts, by comparing the account with other ancient miracle stories the form critic can establish that this account follows a similar pattern. There can also be a comparison with the account of the same event found in Luke and Matthew. Given that all the material for the story was circulated in an oral tradition amongst the Christian community the form critic suggests that it is this form which is recorded now in the texts. Thus we can understand the variations which occur, Matthew has two demons, whilst Mark and Luke only have one, Mark records about 2,000 swine whereas Luke and Matthew make no reference to this at all.

Grammatical criticism looks closely at the actual language of the text. There are two important aspects of this, the first is where there are particular words or phrases which can be studied for true meaning, in the New Testament examples would be 'son of man' and 'kingdom of God', a careful study of how and where these phrases and words are used helps us to create a true meaning. Secondly there is the whole issue of translation, not least the recognition that there can be no full and perfect translation since the translator is providing his or her understanding of the meaning from the original language into the translated one.

In addition to these approaches there are others which, for example draw heavily upon archaeology and other contemporary material, to determine the accuracy of the texts. Thus scholars like Kathleen Kenyon are famous for their archaeological work which in the case of Kathleen Kenyon focused upon the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites and sought to determine when the events occurred, if indeed they occurred at all. Was the city of Jericho already a ruin at the time thought to be the period for the conquest of Canaan, or was the conquest not a single event at all but a long series of incursions into Canaan? In a similar way there has been much research conducted upon Roman crucifixion to determine whether the New Testament accounts of the arrest, trials, and execution of Jesus fit with what is known about the methods employed by the Romans at the time, and thus, for example, were there certain local practices which are particular to Jerusalem and not use in other parts of the Roman world at the time.

Certainly in the Christian tradition biblical scholarship seeks to determine the true meaning of the texts since the belief is that the better one understands the texts the more one can be certain that the message is what God wishes.

Commentary

A very well informed answer. The candidate has tackled the question with an in-depth study of Christian scripture. There is a clear introduction which argues that this is an example of scriptural scholarship. Thus, it is a well resourced answer. Not quite top marks because in a few places the support material needs a little more depth. The paragraph dealing with grammatical criticism is an example where there needs to be a little more of what the true meaning for 'Son of God' is and the implications of having such an understanding.

Level 7 (41 marks)

- (b) **Assess the view that as a particular religion changes and develops, so its scriptures become increasingly less significant.**

(30 marks)

AO2

Candidate Response

denominations and not at all for others. Some groups of Christians would not accept that the scriptures are any less significant today than they were at the beginning of Christianity. Thus many protestant groups see the scriptures as their ultimate authority and all that they do and say is derived from the scriptures. These groups tend to maintain that the Reformation is the perfect example of how they realised that other elements in the church were moving away from the central authority of the scriptures and thus the reformation sought to address this. There are difficulties for these groups caused by biblical criticism since some aspects of the biblical criticism seem to point to the fact that the scriptures cannot be simply read as literal. Thus some protestants reject much of biblical criticism claiming, as happened at the time of the Reformation in Germany, where ordinary people for the first time were able to read the scriptures in their own language, anyone can then follow and understand the scriptures. There is no need for others to provide teaching or interpretation. This approach also questions the of part of the question that is, the apparent assumption that 'religion changes and develops'. Many would suggest that this is not the case. Christianity was fully revealed by Jesus Christ and then interpreted by St Paul and from here God caused the New Testament to be written which thus contains the full and perfect revelation from God. Changing and developing for these protestants means where some Christians moved away from the scriptures and thus move away from true Christianity.

However, many of this group fail to tackle issues like the use of translations and thus by not reading the scriptures in their original how can they be reading the word of God, at best it can only be a translator's idea about the word of God, which surely is not good enough for their claim?

For other Christians there is a view that the scriptures are historic documents, thus they reflect messages and ideas of their time, whilst these may well provide timeless messages, nevertheless, they will not be adequate for the Christian practising in the twenty-first century. The view behind this is that the interaction between God and man is ongoing. Thus although Jesus Christ was indeed God in human form the New Testament, like the Old Testament simply records various occasions when God chooses to directly interact with mankind.

However, there is an ongoing indirect interaction. In the case of Christianity this is often exemplified though the work of the Holy Spirit, which much of Christian theology defines as this style of God's interaction. Thus the argument goes Christianity does indeed change and develop. It does so for a number of reasons, firstly since there is a lot more to learn about God. Then there is the fact that society today is very different from the societies recorded in the scriptures with many different needs and concerns and thus Christianity has to respond to these too with new and different approaches. These responses cannot be found in the scriptures and thus the church must provide them. Thus we see churches like the Roman Catholic and the Anglican churches providing teaching and theologies which do not arise directly from the scriptures. The Anglican Church is able to accept women priest and to review its thinking about homosexuality and in so doing moving well away from what the scriptures seem to suggest both are unacceptable.

It is still not true to say that the scriptures become less significant it is rather that their significance changes. Thus many from what is sometimes called liberal Christians would say the scriptures remain extremely significant in that they provide a detailed historical record of man's interaction with God and man's understanding of God albeit within a particular context. Alongside this view is another which says in addition the scriptures do carry universal truths which can be applied for all humankind at all times, for example the stress upon the One God, and the loving and forgiving nature of God. Similarly there are certain truths about how man should behave from injunctions about not murdering through to ideas that one should behave towards one's fellow man as one would wish oneself to be treated by others.

Commentary

A good, well focused, first paragraph which immediately focuses upon the question. It not only sets the context of the answer but it also immediately begins a discussion about how, for some groups of Christians, the whole statement would be challenged. The second part of the essay presents succinctly how other Christian groups use scripture as a basis upon which ideas are developed. At the same time, there is a clear demonstration how these Christian groups might well have other authorities, like the Holy Spirit which can supersede scripture but do not contradict the spirit of the scripture. Perhaps this latter part of the answer needs as little more supporting material from Christianity to move the answer to Level 7.

Level 6 (26 marks)