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Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 GCE
Religious Studies

Advanced

PAPER 4: Study of Religion

Option 4B: Christianity

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Introduction

Once again it was good to see some really excellent responses. Candidates made good use of the Anthology material in Question 3 but also in other questions where it was relevant which was pleasing to note.

There are areas that centres still need to address such as balancing the amount of time spent on each question is one area candidates can improve upon. Paying close attention to the wording of the question and avoiding presenting material not relevant or not required will also help with timing and focus issues. The trigger words indicate the balance of AO1 and AO2 required in each type of question and the amount of space provided is an indication of how much time should be spent and a limitation on space encourages candidates to keep to this and to focus their writing for the number of marks available. There were many responses to Question 2 that were far too long for the 12 marks available and although of high quality in some cases there were only up to 12 marks to award, and this inevitably meant candidates spent more time on this question than was appropriate and then they may have struggled on the larger essay questions later in the paper.

It is important to select material carefully and to weigh up the strength of, or reasons for, a position and form a conclusion in the 'Assess' question and to engage fully with the question when prompted to 'Analyse' in question 3b ensuring candidates are employing the AO2 skill of providing logical chains of reasoning and making judgements as required by these questions. Weaker responses simply present contrasting views with no AO2 engagement with them. Dealing with the 'Clarify' instruction in Question 3a needs some attention to prevent candidates simply 'translating' or 'paraphrasing' the extract at the lower range of responses but we saw some excellent answers in this question as well.

Question 4, which includes the synoptic element of the course, saw some very high calibre responses. Candidates at the highest level drew on a range of detailed and carefully employed knowledge to deconstruct the issues and offer clear and sustained reasoning and judgement in relation to the question through reviewing and analysing the 'significance' of different views and forming clear judgements. There were some excellent examples of well-crafted and pertinent links made with other components studied and the best ones of these integrated them well within their essay in more than a few sentences, rather than presenting a brief add on sentence. This element is not optional if candidates are to be able to access the full range of the mark scheme therefore centres and candidates need to find a way to employ this in their teaching and learning throughout the course.

Question 1

This was a generally well answered question that required an exploration of key themes about Black theology. Many candidates made good use of Cone and effectively linked their responses to Liberation theology; some strong responses explored the way in which Black theology emerged from the field of struggle and sought to concern itself with issues of everyday challenge from within both church and society as well as how Black theology intent became one of affirming black people's identity; high calibre responses offered the claim that Black theology explores a perspective of God which does not reflect traditional ideas, for example, that Jesus was black rather than white. Weaker candidates relied on descriptive material about Martin Luther King and Malcom X and little acknowledgement of relevant theological issues.

Question 2

This question received a range of relevant responses in that many candidates offered a variety of considerations about whether the 'Bible is the word of God'. These included that the Bible was inerrant, infallible, contained the word of God, a compendium of various authors' views, a historical record, a bunch of fairy tales, contained errors etc etc.

It was expected, and became evident, that answers demonstrated that the Bible arose in an assortment of historical and cultural contexts and contained diverse literary forms: prose, poetry, genealogies, laws, psalms, proverbs, history, philosophy, prophecy, letters, etc. Some candidates explored the claim that despite its many differences the Bible represents one story or metanarrative. Some argued that Christians believed that the Bible is more than just a book written/compiled by humans, but it is the inspired and authoritative word of God. Some were able to discuss that inspiration means that the Bible is not just a record of religious events or individual experiences of God, but the Bible is God's self-revelation (better candidates invoked Barth on this aspect) and one of the methods used by God to communicate with human beings. Equally many were able to contrast some of the forgoing claims with claims that the Bible is just a work of fiction or a collection of myths and fables. Some very good candidates discussed various hermeneutical approaches to understanding the Bible.

Weaker candidates failed to grasp the intent of the question and disappointingly petered out weakly after a page at most. Some argued that errors in the Bible or differences between the Old and New Testaments made it unlikely to be the word of God and left it at that.

Question 3a

The importance of the trigger word 'clarify' cannot be stressed enough. The question is calling for more than a paraphrase or regurgitation of the extract. What is required are answers that 'clarify', in other words a candidate takes some of the issues contained in the extract and unpacks them by making them easier to understand. This is achieved by explaining them in more detail. This skill was evident in a lot of the responses that examiners saw. However, weaker responses suffered from a lack of explaining the issues from the extract in more detail.

Candidates clearly enjoyed getting to grips with the text and it was pleasing to see that many candidates did indeed identify a range of issues from the extract and focused on ideas about 'examining our beliefs' as demanded by the question. Issues such as the lack of evidence for faith, science disproves the existence of God, religious adherents are deluded, having faith is infantile, faith is a process of non-thinking, faith as a form of evil and faith in a 'God' as irrational etc.

Weaker answers relied on simply re-stating or paraphrasing the extract rather than developing and applying the key points; a tendency of some candidates was to write a summary of the extract point by point over the course of a page and a half rather than clarify the points identified.

However, overall, the vast majority of candidates presented answers of a very high quality.

Question 3b

There were many excellent and, indeed, outstanding answers to this question. Many showed detailed knowledge of McGrath's arguments and were equally prepared to engage willingly with the material beyond a mere rehearsing of McGrath's position versus Dawkins. Many responses demonstrated a good ability to not only explain and evaluate McGrath's key points but also offer some critical analysis to further elucidate the arguments being discussed. Some structured their answers effectively by taking each of the points made by Dawkins and immediately explained and developed McGrath's critique to that specific point. Successful answers had candidates providing objective and thorough unpacking of the key arguments and the possible issues arising along with evidence of a comprehensive reading/understanding of the anthology. Many candidates arrived at a conclusion derived from the argumentation offered and then took a position in which they agreed/disagreed with McGrath.

Disappointingly some weaker responses focused heavily on Dawkins' views in this question rather than McGrath's and thus limited the marks that could be attained.

Question 4

Many candidates focused on the various understandings of the belief about the Eucharist. However, this question asked for the 'significance of the Eucharist' which was not always evident in some responses in that some responses only mentioned the diverse beliefs and failed to identify their significance for believers.

Generally, candidates managed to engage with a range of technical terms such as transubstantiation, transignification, consubstantiation, memorialism, real presence, virtualism, and transfinalisation, with their significance confidently applied by the better responses; the significance of the sacramental understanding of the eucharist was offered in some high calibre responses. Some weaker answers were able to outline some of the different practices – e.g. who performs the Eucharist, who eats and drinks what and in what format, without any explanation of their significance for believers.

The synoptic link element the question was handled well by very many candidates although sadly it still did not appear in a significant proportion of answers which limits the levels of the mark scheme available to that candidate. This link was most effectively done when clearly signposted and then elaborated in a short paragraph or two on how the topics linked to each other. Some responses created this link throughout an essay with some considerable skill.

