



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE
RELIGIOUS STUDIES – UNIT 3: CATHOLIC
CHRISTIANITY AND ETHICAL THEMES
3121U30-1**

SUMMER 2023

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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UNIT 3: CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY AND ETHICAL THEMES

General Comments

The paper was accessible to the majority of candidates. A good level of knowledge and understanding was demonstrated by candidates, particularly in the lower order questions. Candidates were generally confident in using key religious language and there were some answers that demonstrated excellence in this area.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar was found to be very good with the majority of candidates achieving intermediate or higher marks.

The (a) questions were extremely accessible with the majority of candidates answering these well and showing good knowledge and understanding of the key terms.

Generally, the (b) questions were answered fairly well and were mostly detailed. A significant number of candidates did not attempt the question on 'Icthus,' despite it being a key term. There seemed to be a misunderstanding of the trigger word 'describe', with a number of candidates explaining or even evaluating in their answers.

There appeared to be an improvement in the responses to the (c) questions this year, with candidates understanding the trigger word, although a few still included an element of analysis in their answers.

Candidates appear to be aware of the need to write at length for the (d) questions, as was demonstrated by the SPAG marks. A significant number of candidates used evaluative language in their answers and there was good evidence of analysis in many responses. It appears unhelpful for lower ability candidates in particular to try and use phrases such as 'this is a strong/weak argument because ...'

Unlike last year, there was no element of choice in this year's paper. Candidates were aware of the demands of the paper and the majority answered every question.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) 'What do Catholics mean by 'Bible?'

This question was well answered by the vast majority of candidates. A variety of responses showed the very good level of knowledge on this key concept.

Q.1 (b) 'Describe how the Bible is used by Catholics.'

In question 1 b, candidates were able to express themselves clearly and could generally coherently describe uses of the Bible. A small number of candidates misunderstood the question and talked about the importance of the Bible instead.

Q.1 (c) 'Explain Catholic beliefs about Heaven and Hell.'

Candidates were generally confident in their knowledge of the afterlife and could clearly express some Catholic beliefs. A significant number of candidates mentioned purgatory, and this was accepted if it was linked to Heaven. However, a number of candidates showed a misunderstanding of the concept of purgatory. Some believed it is where judgement takes place, while others described it as a place between heaven and hell. It is important to note that purgatory is a place of cleansing before the soul reaches its final resting place in Heaven. This was a point also raised last year and needs clarification with candidates. The Catholic concept of judgement was also mentioned by some candidates, and again this was accepted if linked to the idea of Heaven and/or Hell.

Q.1 (d) 'Going on a pilgrimage is the best way to worship God.'

Skills of analysis and evaluation appear to have improved somewhat this year. Candidates were generally confident in the expectations of this type of question, and most were aware of the need to write at length to fully address the statement. Many candidates were confident in expressing ideas about pilgrimage, and clear analysis was seen in addressing the concept of pilgrimage as a way to worship God. However, the candidates that accessed the highest band and marks fully addressed the question by discussing whether or not pilgrimage was the best way to worship God. Those responses suggested and analysed alternative ways to worship God with conclusions to support their ideas.

Q.2 (a) 'What do Catholics mean by 'crucifix?'

This question generally well answered by the majority of candidates. Nearly all candidates seemed aware of what a crucifix is, although this wasn't clearly expressed in some answers.

Q.2 (b) 'Describe the meaning of Icthus.'

A significant number of candidates responded well to this question, showing an awareness of the key concept. However, a large proportion did not respond at all and wrote nothing for this answer. It's vital to reiterate to candidates that even when they're unsure, it's important to try and respond to each question. The positive marking employed by the WJEC means that, if they include something that is creditworthy in their response, they will achieve marks.

Q.2 (c) 'Explain Catholic beliefs about the Pope.'

It was a pleasure to read some responses to this question due to the excellent religious language employed by some candidates. A small number of candidates appeared confused about the concept of infallibility; it does not mean that the Pope is never wrong about anything. Additionally, there was some confusion observed between papal infallibility and apostolic succession. However, generally the knowledge and understanding on this was at a very good level and most candidates were able to gain marks on this question.

Q.2 (d) 'Catholics must only pray to Mary.'

Again, it was a pleasure to see excellent religious language being used confidently by a significant number of candidates in their responses to this question. There was a very good level of knowledge and understanding shown here, and candidates were able to analyse the statement well.

Q.3 (a) 'What do Catholics mean by 'divorce?'

Many candidates were familiar with this key concept, and were able to give clearly expressed answers. However, there was some confusion with the concept of annulment in some responses.

Q.3 (b) 'Describe the work of Marriage Care.'

Some candidates appeared to be familiar with marriage Care and were able to describe the work of the organisation. However, a significant number of candidates didn't seem to know that this was an organisation. Many answers were quite general and some talked about how to care for a marriage.

Q.3 (c) 'Explain Catholic teachings about the equality of women and men.'

A very good level of knowledge and understanding was observed in response to question 3c, with many candidates confident in their expression of equality. Teachings such as imago Dei and Galatians 3:28 were utilised well in answers, and candidates were able to explain how these were relevant. A small number of candidates attempted to analyse this as a statement, which did not necessarily fulfil the demands of the question and was reflected in the marks.

Q.3 (d) 'For Catholics, marriage should be for life.'

Many candidates were confident in analysing marriage in this question, and a significant number of responses showed awareness of the issues that can be experienced by married couples. A good level of religious language was seen here, with key terms such as sacrament, adultery, and annulment being used in context and with understanding. Candidates should ensure that they reference sources of wisdom and authority where appropriate so as to achieve the highest Band.

Q.4 (a) 'What do Catholic mean by 'human rights?'

Generally, most candidates answered this question well, and could give relevant examples of human rights. However, a significant number of responses seemed to confuse the idea of human rights with the concept of free will.

Q.4 (b) 'Describe how Catholics might use their wealth.'

The candidates that responded well to this question showed knowledge of how wealth can be used effectively, and could offer some relevant examples. However, a number of candidates confused the question with 'why' instead of 'how'. Responses from these candidates included reasons why they should be careful or responsible with their wealth, which didn't answer the question being asked. This was reflected in the marks awarded.

Q.4 (c) 'Explain why Catholics should show respect for others.'

As with the previous question, there was some confusion between 'why' and 'how' here. A number of candidates explained how they could show respect for others, with examples. Unfortunately, this did not answer the question and was reflected in the marks awarded. The candidates that read the question correctly were confident in explaining the reasons why Catholics should show respect for others, including reference to sources of authority.

Q.4 (d) 'Catholics should only support CAFOD.'

Responses to question 4d were quite general, with few candidates referring to sources of wisdom and authority to support their points. Most candidates were aware of the work of CAFOD and could express this in their responses. However, fewer analysed the statement well and on many occasions, the answer became a description or explanation of CAFOD's work. The candidate that accessed the highest bands and marks here were those who included evaluation and analysis of the statement.

Generally, the level of religious language in candidates' responses was very good, and many candidates appeared to be confident in using religious terminology throughout the paper. Indeed, it was a pleasure to see the standard of this in some responses, particularly those in 2c and 2d.

A small number of candidates did not clearly label the question they were answering on the additional writing pages included in the booklet. This can be difficult in matching up the response to the correct question, and can lead to delays in the marking process. That being said there was a marked improvement in this from last year, and most candidates that used the additional space remembered to clearly label each response. It was good to see this space being utilised well by candidates when needed.

Summary of key points

- A few candidates used bullet points in their answers. It is important to remind them not to do this, as it is unlikely that their answer will be coherent and highly detailed if bullet points are utilised.
- It is important to remember that the key concepts in the specification could be used in any question, not just the (a) questions. Having a (b) question about 'Icthus' seemed to confuse some candidates. They can also use key concepts in any of their answers, where relevant, not just the (a) responses.
- When attempting (d) questions, a formulaic approach limits candidates in many cases. For example, including 'this is a strong/weak argument' in a response should only be done if there is a good understanding of what this means and if there is a relevant point to be made.
- Candidates should read each question carefully and fully before responding.
- Candidates should be aware of the 'trigger' word in each question and understand what this is requesting of them.



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