



## 2010 Texts and Traditions GA 3: Written examination

### GENERAL COMMENTS

Students found no difficulties with the new format of the examination following the redevelopment and reaccreditation of the *VCE Texts and Traditions Study Design*. It was encouraging to see that many students were able to develop a more sophisticated discussion of topics or aspects than students had been able to do in recent years. This was especially true of the exegetical analysis response. Being required to complete only one exegetical response under the new format meant that many students were able to use more of the knowledge they had learnt in class while studying Outcome 3 in Unit 3 and Outcome 1 in Unit 4. Having time to go into one passage more thoroughly allowed the more successful students to explain the passage they analysed by integrating the highlighted words and phrases with a more complex discussion of the passage.

A major concern, however, was the general inability of students to undertake the new Question 4b. Question 4, as shown in the sample examination paper published on the VCAA website in April 2010 and further explained in the September 2010 *VCAA Bulletin VCE, VCAL and VET*, offered students the choice of two options: Question 4a. or Question 4b. Question 4a. reflected the practice and question style of past papers. This question asked students to use their knowledge from Area of Study 1 of Unit 3 to comment on an aspect of sociocultural-historical or religious context or practice from the time the set text appeared and was presented to the original community. As explained in past assessment reports for Texts and Traditions, this task is a commentary on a textual passage, not an exegesis. While there are still students who try to write a mini-exegesis on the passage provided, this number has decreased significantly.

The new question format, Question 4b., used the same passage. However, the task was related to Area of Study 2 of Unit 4. As per the study design (page 29), the student should be able to demonstrate:

- how the later tradition interpreted the text in the light of the particular idea, belief or social theme
- the continuing relevance and meaning of the set text for a religious tradition when it develops a response to a particular religious idea, belief or social theme.

Of concern was that this task was often misinterpreted across all traditions where students attempted Question 4b., because students may not have fully understood the outcome itself. Many students who achieved high and very high scores on other questions of the paper gained only minimal marks for their Question 4b. response, and this suggests uncertainty about what Outcome 2 of Unit 4 requires. It was not about the historical or literary influences that brought about the text (Area of Study 2, Unit 3). Nor was it about the theological significance, as distinct from sociocultural, of the passage as understood by the original community. Unfortunately, students approached 4b. from both of these angles.

Alternatively, while often demonstrating a high degree of knowledge, some students wrote answers to Question 4b. as if the passage given from the text itself contained the later tradition and used an earlier idea, belief or theme. Their responses considered how the given passage used and referred to earlier traditions. The study design glossary (page 35) clearly defines 'later tradition' as 'the religious tradition in a period of history after that of the formation of the text'. Therefore, for example, identifying or explaining that a gospel or Qur'anic text used a theme from the Hebrew Scriptures is not an example of how the passage was used after it was formed and at some later historical time.

Answers to Question 4b. that began, 'The church's attitude to the marginalised, represented in the passage by the widows and lepers, was taken up by Vatican II in its document *Gaudium et Spes* ...' or that used the Lucan passage, 'In addressing the issue of refugees and 'the boat people', the later tradition has looked to Luke's views on Elijah and Elisha ministering to outsiders ...' showed complete understanding of the task. Similarly, very good responses to the Johannine passage could discuss, for example, either the way John 2:6–10a was used in developing teachings on the Eucharist or by Martin Luther. Or again, in response to 4b. on Surah 2:126–129, students may have explained how Muslims in Western society exhibited traditional beliefs about rites of worship in aligning mosques towards Mecca, or used the given passage to discuss how the issue was resolved after the recent discovery in some Indonesian Islamic centres that the alignment towards Mecca had been miscalculated. All of these examples demonstrate the various traditions going back to the original text when faced with some ideological or social situation that needed to be addressed within the tradition at some time, often much later, after the formation of the text. This is the essence of Outcome 2 of Unit 4.

Most students seemed to realise that, under the new examination format, each of the three Parts – Extended responses, Essay and Exegetical response – carried the same number of marks, and therefore needed to be completed in about the same amount of time. In line with students being able to develop more substantial exegetical responses because of the subtle shift in time management, many students developed stronger and slightly longer essays than in past years.



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## Section I – The Gospel according to John

### Part A – Extended response

#### Question 1

In reviewing the way in which students handled Question 1 on Nicodemus, it was concerning that some students seemed to know little outside the passages set for special study. The *VCAA Bulletin*, *VCE VCAL and VET* and study design, as well as past assessment reports, make it clear that the set text is the whole of the Gospel according to John. It was therefore disappointing that so many students made reference only to Chapter 3, ignoring where Nicodemus appears later in the gospel (7:50 and 19:39). While it was not necessary to discuss all three appearances, those students who did were able to answer the third part of the question clearly by explaining why the evangelist presented, or used, Nicodemus as either a historical or literary figure, or type.

#### Question 2

Not all commentators agree that the Prologue to the gospel is a chiasm; for example, many students referred to F. Moloney's exploration of interpretation on literary structure, which considers this possibility even if he then dismisses it. The wording of the question explicitly allowed for this. However, even those who argued for the Prologue being chiastic did so very poorly, with vague descriptions of what a chiastic structure was. Literary structure could be further emphasised across all traditions.

#### Question 3

Students generally answered this question well, following the three-part structure of the question and answering each part. Students should be guided in extended-response style questions by the number of parts, or sub-questions, in the question. Generally, there will be a requirement to identify or name a simple knowledge component, followed by a requirement to interpret or explain something. This distinguishes between those students who can only recall information and those who understand the significance of that information.

#### Question 4

The following information was published in the *VCAA Bulletin*: 'Teachers are reminded that the new Question 4 is divided into options a. and b. Both options relate to the same given scriptural extract taken from the set texts. Students may choose to complete either 4a. or 4b., but must not answer both. Question 4a. required students to apply their understanding of the key knowledge of Outcomes 1 and 2 of Unit 3. Question 4b. related to Outcome 2 of Unit 4'. There was no confusion evident in students' responses about the rubric, with no students doing both 4a. and 4b. A very small number of students did, however, complete Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4.

### Part B – Essay

#### Question 5

This question relied on students understanding the Johannine literary technique of misunderstanding. Not all students competently understood how and why this technique was used by the evangelist, and often did not explain how it led to discourse or Jesus' further teaching on the topic, although most at least mentioned that misunderstanding often led to conflict. This question required students to focus on the passages for special study, and the majority of students complied with that instruction. Examples from outside these passages as one or two of the required three were ignored. Where a supplementary example was drawn from outside the passages for special study to support one of the three examples correctly drawn from those passages, those auxiliary examples were considered within the general discussion. However, it was not necessary to provide more than the number of examples asked for as students then tend to have less sophisticated discussions about a larger number of examples rather than in-depth and incisive elaboration on the required number of examples.

#### Question 6

Developing an essay answer that discusses one of the passages set for special study requires students to be able to synthesise their knowledge. It also requires that, rather than applying exegetical method to a specific passage or chapter, they integrate knowledge they have gained from being able to complete such an exegesis with a wider knowledge of the themes and ideas found within the passage, possibly both as they exist within that passage and to the whole text. The response demands that students understand the message(s) that this passage conveyed to the original community of believers. In order to demonstrate all this knowledge, it is imperative that a student brings to the task generic essay writing skills, beginning with creating a focused structure. Otherwise, rather than developing an essay response, students produce a series of minimally linked extracts of several discussions.

This question offered students the opportunity to discuss at least two characters involved in the narrative of Chapter 20. Students were able to develop a more insightful discussion when the characters they chose were dissimilar, such as by

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contrasting Peter's and the Beloved Disciple's levels of belief, or by contrasting Thomas' reaction with the other disciples generally. Another effective technique was to take the developing understanding of the significance of finding no body and then meeting Jesus as displayed to Mary Magdalene. What students needed to be clear about, however, was that each of these encounters should have represented something of different significance to the early community of readers of John's gospel. Often, what determined how highly a student scored was whether they took their argument or discussion to that next level.

## Question 7

This question asked students to demonstrate that they understood the difference between a symbol and something to be taken literally. In many cases this was not done well, suggesting that students need to read the examination questions more carefully.

The question also concentrated on a central theme to the passages chosen for special study this year, and so covered several outcomes of the study. However, it did not restrict students to discussion of just those passages for special study. Assessors accepted students' delineation of separate episodes liberally accepting, for example, both the feeding of the five thousand narrative (6:1–14) and the Bread of Life discourse (6:52–59) as two episodes. As the three given words 'bread', 'feeding' and 'feasting' applied to a central theme, it was not necessary for students to relate their discussion to each of these words explicitly if by discussing the theme as a whole these terms were implied. The most successful students showed understanding of the connections evident in the three episodes chosen incorporating, for example, concepts of the messianic banquet, Jesus' 'I am the Bread of Life' statement, and the sharing of the piece of bread in 13:26, 30.

## Part C – Exegetical response

### Questions 8–10

Comments on exegetical responses refer to methodological skills rather than to each passage. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that students showed no preference for any one passage, with each of the three undertaken in almost equal numbers.

The September 2010 *VCAA Bulletin*, *VCE*, *VCAL* and *VET* listed the six criteria against which the exegetical response would be assessed. These merely echoed the dot points of the study design, taking into account Outcome 3 of Unit 3 and Outcome 1 of Unit 4. Together with a general criterion of knowledge and skills of exegetical method, they also reflected the instructions to students in Part C of the examination, and gave equal weighting to each of the criteria.

Students can develop a more cohesive exegesis if they identify or discuss the meaning and significance of the highlighted words and phrases within the body of their exegetical analysis rather than as an appendix at the end. What they should recognise is that those who set the Texts and Traditions examination have the dot points of the instructions in mind when choosing which words to highlight.

Taking Question 8 (John 2:13–25) as an example, consider the five highlighted expressions viz a viz the dot points of the instructions:

- money changers – has a sociocultural/religious aspect needing identification, allows students to demonstrate detailed knowledge that assists with mark discrimination (for example, reference to Tyrian money), and also allows commentary on the legitimacy of the job within the context
- my Father's house – allows discussion of literary technique (misunderstanding) or the emerging identity/nature of Jesus and the theme of sonship
- this temple – enables students to discuss any of the historical temple, misunderstanding as literary technique, Jesus' body and resurrection or as 'replacement', and/or the nature of Christian worship post 70 CE. A reasonably significant number of students even compared the two Greek words used for 'temple', *hieron* and *oikos*
- remembered that he had said this – shows some significance for the disciples after the resurrection (perhaps as a redaction) and the Johannine Community as they slowly came to understand Jesus' teaching and face the delay of the Parousia
- they saw the signs that he was doing – could allow the placement of this passage within the 'Book of Signs' context, as a literary structure, or an astute recognition that in the structure of the gospel narrative Jesus had been recorded as having performed only one sign to date, and that privately, yet the text uses the plural. This allows incisive discussion.

There could be other approaches to each of these highlighted expressions as well. However, the highlighted words and phrases are meant to assist in the student's exegesis, discussion and analysis of the passage as a whole. Teachers should



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be able to go through the other passages to show their students how to relate highlighted words to the criteria of the instructions and published exegetical marking scheme.

### Section II: The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel

#### Part A – Extended responses

As a general comment, there is no need to repeat material in different responses. The questions are set to minimise use of the same information in different responses, and this is certainly the case in extended response questions.

In awarding a score for extended responses, assessors looked for more than just the ability to name an aspect of a theme or relate the circumstances of an event; they expected students to be able to explain what was important about the information provided. Top scores for such questions were reserved for those students who went on to interpret the significance of the material they had explained.

In Section II, no students attempted Question 4b. However, future students and their teachers are referred to the general comments above on Question 4.

#### Part B – Essay

Each of the small number of students completing Section II presented a strong essay response. Answers were rewarded highly because students used the breadth of their knowledge to discuss the prompt, and made judgments about the material they presented. It is interesting that the students writing essays in this section were able to quote extensively from the set texts, not just the passages for special study, to support their view. This demonstrated sound knowledge, and the skill with which passages were integrated suggested solid essay writing practice as part of the teaching and learning program.

Students should be careful to check whether they are expected to use examples from one or both of the prophets. The questions have been designed to help provide a structure for each essay.

#### Part C – Exegetical responses

As in other sections of the examination, it was possible to provide solid contextual explanations in the exegetical passages on the Jewish prophets. Strong responses were couched in confident expression and the students not only picked up highlighted phrases to discuss in detail, but also related each phrase to other aspects of the passage. Good exegetical responses link ideas within the wider set text. This approach demonstrates that the student understands the purpose of this exegetical passage within the larger context of the prophet's book.

### Section III: The Gospel according to Luke

#### Part A – Extended responses

##### Question 1

While a large number of students responded to this question well, very few took the option of responding to the breadth of the first part: outline what is known about Simon Peter. Some students presented a very wide knowledge of Simon Peter both within and beyond the gospel but most limited their response to Simon Peter in the Gospel of Luke, which was the second part of a three-part question. This second part was answered most successfully by students who were able to recall their knowledge of Simon Peter across the entire gospel, rather than the appearances in the passages for special study. A significant number of students did not attempt the final part of the question. It is important, as has been stressed over many years, that students use the question to format their responses and check that all parts have been answered.

##### Question 2

Most students referred to the prologue to respond to this question, although a few chose to refer to the Infancy Narratives, which seems to run against the rest of the question. In most cases, naming the prologue and then summarising it answered the first two sections of this question. Again, as in Question 1, quite a few students avoided answering the 'why' question. If students cannot delve into these types of questions and answer them confidently then they will limit the marks they can achieve for them.

##### Question 3

Most responses to this question began with a limited list rather than the broader description the question asked the student to present. Some students struggled to find examples of characters called to discipleship that were relevant to their initial list. Practice in finding examples to illustrate concepts is important preparation for an examination. As in



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Questions 1 and 2, there were significant numbers of students who did not fully answer the question or did not refer to the 'early Christian community' in their attempts to answer the final part of this question.

### Question 4a.

This question was generally well answered. As noted in the introductory sections, some students still mistake this question to be either an exegetical exercise or a thematic question. Many students, however, used the text well to illustrate attitudes, both in the time of Jesus and during the time of the prophets, towards these groups of people.

### Question 4b.

The most successful responses to this question started by naming the theme that arises from the passage and then speaking of how the later tradition has imitated or used the attitudes and teachings from this passage to inform their later actions or teachings. The most successful responses named social justice as the theme, referred to the Christian tradition's later teachings on social justice and then showed how such teachings come from within the text presented. The less successful responses either summarised the passage with no reference to the later tradition or avoided the text altogether and only mentioned the theme as it appears in the later tradition.

## Part B – Essay

The essay questions tended to be answered fairly well, with a majority of students reading the basics of the question well and using suitable examples from the required passages. However, students needed to do more than name and describe a passage to receive high marks. A passage needed to be analysed, with students drawing relevant details from it to support the main argument of their essays.

### Question 5

While this essay was popular and tended to be written competently, many students failed to link the use of healing miracles to proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Some students chose passages that would not usually be considered a healing miracle and did not justify the passage as being part of that literary type. Students who chose miracles from outside of the passages for special study often had little knowledge of the details of the passage. It must be remembered that the entire text of the Gospel of Luke is named as the set text so students should be able to use examples from anywhere in the gospel competently.

### Question 6

This question was the least popular in this Section of the examination. It relied on students being able to recall two examples from the passages for special study in which Jesus is called the 'Son of Man'. While some students were able to do this, others almost ignored the title or substituted it with other titles. Students who were able to choose suitable passages outlined them well, but a great number of students did not move on to the main part of the essay, which asked for a reason for the use of this title. Students who were able to refer to the Hebrew Scripture's use of this title, and the variety of nuances this title had, did exceptionally well.

### Question 7

As in the previous questions, students who did not do well in this essay did not answer the basic requirements of the question: use the Lord's Prayer and two parables to discuss prayer in Luke's gospel. Most students, however, did discuss aspects of the Lord's Prayer competently and moved on to the parables about prayer to further illustrate their point of view.

## Part C – Exegetical responses

### Questions 8–10

The following comments on exegetical responses refer to methodological skills rather than to each passage. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that students showed no preference for any one passage, each of the three being undertaken in almost equal proportions.

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It is worth stating again, that students can develop a more cohesive exegesis if they identify or discuss the meaning and significance of the highlighted words and phrases within the body of their exegetical analysis, rather than as an



appendix at the end. What they should recognise is that those who set the Texts and Traditions paper have the dot points of the examination instructions in mind when choosing which words to highlight.

Using Question 10 (Luke 22:7–20) as an example, consider the five highlighted expressions viz a viz the dot points of the instructions:

- day of Unleavened Bread – can be discussed in the context section as Luke uses this, as he so often does, to carry the narrative forward and to indicate the passage of time from the previous passage. Obviously, a student would also refer to this term in discussing the background to the text, explaining their understanding of this day and its relationship to the Passover festival
- a man carrying a jar of water – this allows students to discuss gender roles in the society of Jesus. Many students commented on the idea that it would be usual for women to carry jars of water. Some students saw this section as prophetic and so used it for literary form
- before I suffer – this alludes to early Passion predictions so could be used in the literary technique section of the exegesis. It also foreshadows the events that occur in the next chapter
- kingdom of God – allows students to discuss this as a theme, but they always need to make sure that they focus only on the use of the term in the passage and are not carried away with an exposition of the meaning of the term throughout the gospel
- new covenant – this term needs to be explained as a part of the social, historical and religious background to the text. The more successful students are able to show a firm knowledge of the background of such terminology.

## Section IV: The Qur'an

### Part A – Extended responses

#### Question 1

While most students were able to draw out four reasons for Abraham's importance, not all of them were able to explain the reasons. These questions always require the student to move beyond simple recall of information – they need to be able to explain and analyse the information they provide.

#### Question 2

This question tended to be answered in two ways: the first, and less successful, way was to list the passages and summarise them without any further work; the second, and better, way was to draw out common teachings and bring these concepts together to explain 'righteousness and piety'.

#### Question 3

Many students who answered this question failed to show a good understanding of why the Meccan opponents of the Prophet had difficulty with the idea of life after death and instead moved on to the second part of the question and retold the arguments given by the Qur'an. Successful students demonstrated a firm understanding of the social and historical background to the text and therefore were able to discuss the views of the opponents competently.

#### Question 4a.

A good response to this question drew words and phrases from the passage that indicated why Mecca was seen to be sacred. Some students made little, if any, reference to the text provided and instead wrote a paragraph on the sacredness of Mecca.

#### Question 4b.

Students who answered this question tended to focus on the importance of Mecca in the later Islamic tradition and did so fairly well but, again, did not go back to the text to show how that idea arose from this text.

Both answers for Questions 4a. and 4b. needed to work from the text and use the language and ideas of the text as the basis for the response.

### Part B – Essay

Nearly all students answered Question 5 in the essay section. While some did so very well, showing a firm knowledge of divorce and women's rights, or lack of them, at the time of the revelation of the relevant passages. Unfortunately, most students used the text provided in Question 10 and almost rewrote it as the main part of their essay. While it is legitimate for students to refer to passages provided in the examination, they cannot rely entirely on such passages to answer other questions. A good essay in Texts and Traditions will use a number of examples from the required passages and will show a depth of knowledge of the social, historical and religious setting of the audience that originally received

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the texts. It is important that students also demonstrate an understanding of the range of different groups and their beliefs in the receiving community and the reasons why those groups believed what they did.

## **Part C – Exegetical responses**

It is worth reading the general overview of how to approach exegetical responses in the John and Luke sections of this report.

Students of the Qur'an have a tendency to retell a passage, expanding on, but not always explaining, terms and phrases. Students need to be provided with the criteria for the exegetical responses before the examination and be led through the way the criteria provide a sense of structure for their response. As in the other sections, students who do well have a broad knowledge beyond the text and are able to relate that knowledge to the text itself.