

2018 VCE Texts and Traditions examination report

General comments

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

The 2018 examination was the second examination based on the revised study design (2017–2021).

Students seemed to approach Question 4 with confidence. In responses to Question 4 and some exegetical responses, however, some students included material that showed the depth and breadth of their knowledge of aspects of the study, but that was neither required to answer the question nor addressed the examination’s criteria for the exegesis. Students must be selective of what they include in their responses.

Unit 3, Area of Study 1 requires knowledge of the sociocultural context of the tradition’s original community. This involves aspects affecting the tradition that either predate the set text or are contemporaneous with it. As such, it requires knowledge from outside the set text. The study of the set text is not enough in itself.

As the knowledge of the sociocultural context can be assessed in any of the three parts of the examination, it is important that students revisit this material when preparing for the examination. Section B, Part 1, Question 1 required students to write about the purpose of the Temple, restricting consideration to the historical time of the prophet Jeremiah. How the purpose of the Temple was presented after Jeremiah’s time was not required. In Section C, Part 1, Question 3, students were asked to discuss first-century understanding of the literary feature ‘infancy narratives’. Many students who answered this question could explain how the content of the infancy narratives of the gospel worked thematically within the set text but showed little understanding of the use of this literary feature in society at that time. Question 4a. began ‘What factors led to...’, and this required students to consider some of ‘the social, cultural, religious and political conditions and institutions of the society out of which the tradition emerged’ (Unit 3, Area of Study 1, first key knowledge bullet point), but many students ignored this aspect.

As an example involving the exegesis, in Section D, Part 3, Question 8, the word ‘superstitions’ was in bold type and needed explication. However, very few students gave examples of contemporary superstitions, except for copying out or explaining the one example given in that verse of the extract. This did not show knowledge of the sociocultural context.

On the other hand, note how the following response explains what was happening in Mecca at the time of revelation in a manner that uses information outside the Qur’an as part of the exegesis on Section D, Part 3, Question 10. It is evident that the student was aware of the requirement to use the sociocultural context, even naming an individual involved, and referred to scholars.

In Mecca at the time of the revelation of this Surah (chapter of the Qur’an). The disbelievers were trying their “best to misconstrue the message of Tawheed”. To achieve this objective, they used to harshly persecute the believers; mock them; throw them out of their homes. Whilst with Prophet Muhammad, the “disbelievers were trying to engage in a negotiation; whereby they put

before him proposals of wealth and power; so he could stop preaching the message of Al-Islam. "These negotiations were led by chief leaders of the Quraysh clans ie Utbah Ibn Rab'iah." This incidence of negotiations is narrated by many mufassirs like Maududi Ibn Hisham and Al-Bidayah Wan Nihayah with slight variations in wording.

Alongside a general lack of awareness of sociocultural contexts in many student responses, there appeared to be a lack of depth in the study of the whole set text. Many students could only minimally respond to questions about set chapters that were not passages for special study. This was most evident in the extended responses, and was also apparent when students provided examples from only the passages for special study in essays when this was not required.

Students must be clear about reference to, and use of, 'scholarly opinion' and the use of 'interpretative commentaries' as required by the study design. In particular, this requirement is a criterion for both Part 2 – Essay and Part 3 – Exegetical response.

Not all students remembered which scholar said what and a number of responses in the examination did not refer to a scholar at all. These students did not score as highly against the fifth criterion. However, the majority of students had some idea about key scholars. The level to which students used scholars, referring to them by name, and included their key ideas, determined where their scores were placed across the score range.

Only the students who scored highly were able to quote in a meaningful manner the scholars to whom they referred, while the highest-scoring compared the opinions of several scholars. Like all key knowledge and key skills listed for each outcome in the study design, there is a spectrum of achievement in how well students master these aspects of key knowledge areas and key skills. So too in the examination there is a range of how well students handled the criteria involving scholarship. It is not a requirement that students quote scholars, but students who could do so generally achieved higher scores as they demonstrated a higher level of knowledge.

Specific information

Part 1 – Extended responses

Question 4

Question 4a. required students to do two things. The first was to identify factors about the idea, belief or theme that significantly affected the original community. Students who relied on only their set text were disadvantaged. The sociocultural context must be known. The second was to identify and discuss passages in the set text that explained why the idea, belief or theme was important to that original community. Question 4a. did not require discussion of understandings and teachings of the later tradition, or historical information of the who, when and where in the later tradition this idea, belief or theme was considered. Many students included later tradition material in Question 4a. Further, in requiring students to identify and discuss particular textual passages, it should be noted that in 2018 students were asked to use passages from the set texts for 2018, not just the passages for special study.

The following high-scoring response to Question 4a. shows that the student clearly understood the importance of the sociocultural and religious contexts in the formation of the central message or belief in the set text. The student then located the original audience, and, with precision, not only identified passages from the set text but even quoted them. Overall, this response entailed a sense of purpose to the message brought about by the sociocultural dimensions of the time.

A religious idea that was interpreted in the set texts original community was Shirk. Shirk is the association of other deities (physical or non-physical) with the one God, Allah SWT. This idea was important to the set text's original communities, the Meccan disbelievers and believers

because it stood as a barrier between the foundations of Islam and their Covenant with God. Which required them to believe in only the One God, Allah SWT. To whom they (the disbelievers of Mecca) actually acknowledged and professed as their God. But contradicted their own claims, by worshipping other deities (ie idols) besides him.

Socioculturally, the disbelievers of Mecca used these idols as a medium of communication between him and the One, Mighty God. In this way they strayed from the essential basis of Islam, 'Tawheed'. And hence the Prophet Muhammad came and revived the original belief of 'Tawheed', and admonished the deviated ones by exhorting his people to "Worship none but Allah". And as quoted from v.6 of Surah 41; saying to them "That your God is but One God, so take the Right Way towards Him." Hence asking them to leave this immoral practice as it meant "breaking the Covenant of Obedience to Allah," as mentioned in Surah Maidah. Therefore, these verses show how important it was to extinguish Shirk as it was a great barrier between the Word of God and His Servants as well as what He required of them, so as to making sure that the disbelievers were admonished of this "grave suspicion" of theirs.

In the second example provided here, on the identity and nature of Jesus, the student correctly explained the historical context within which the original community found itself and that made the idea, belief or theme significant to the original community, the Johannine Community. Second, the student identified passages – even to the precision of individual verses – that were important to the original audience's understanding of the idea, belief or theme.

Question 4a.

The identity and nature of Jesus was a concept of paramount importance to the Johannine Community. The importance of Jesus' identity can be seen in the fact that it is immediately relayed in the Prologue (1:1-18). 1:1, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God" summarises the nature of Jesus. He was and will be eternally God. However, 1:14 "the word became flesh" highlights the reality that while divine, Jesus became human. The factors which led this to becoming important in the Johannine Community was the reality that the question 'Who is Jesus?' was the question raging in the synagogues of the first century AD and was largely responsible for aposynagogos (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Indeed, the identity of Jesus even caused conflict in the community of which Gnostics were members who disregarded the importance of the 'flesh' and Jesus' humanity. 13:21, "Jesus was troubled in spirit" emphasizes the human nature of Jesus likely for the purpose of refuting those who would say he was not.

Question 4b. required students to explain how the idea, belief or theme was developed or interpreted within the later tradition. This is where the who, when and where aspects of Unit 4, Area of Study 2 – that some students incorrectly provided in Question 4a. – became significant. The question then asked students to return to, and explain how, the original set texts affected later development or reinforcement of the idea, belief or theme. Many students did not attempt this second requirement.

The following is a response to Question 4b. by the same student cited above. The student understood the later development and by whom, when and where the larger tradition redressed the distortion that had happened. Note, too, the continued precision of scriptural references and dates. Again, as the student had done in Question 4a., the Greek is used as appropriate, in this case as used by a named scholar.

The idea of Jesus' identity and nature was one developed four centuries after Jesus' death largely by Nestorius – archbishop of Constantinople after 428 AD – a man who argued that Jesus had a "third person of union". Theologian, Susan Wessel, states that Nestorius "believed that Christ had "two natures" connected by "prospoonon". Ultimately, Nestorius' belief was condemned as Heresy at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) which concluded that Jesus had "two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without severance, without division". Further the Catechism of the Catholic Church refuted Nestorianism as Heresy in articles 479-481. The original text primarily argued this belief based

upon the Prologue and its emphasis that the divine Logos did become “flesh” (1:11). Moreover, the fact that Jesus poured blood in 19:34 and died (19:30) highlights his human nature. Moreover his beckoning claim in 6:51 that “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” highlights the importance of a human Jesus both physically and mentally.

A student cannot be awarded marks for providing information in Question 4a., for example, that should have been given in Question 4b. A student must include material in the appropriate question part. Students must be careful not to write about an idea, belief or theme that developed in the later tradition as if it were already part of the set text.

Part 2 – Essay

The highest-scoring essays displayed outstanding knowledge and skills, and contained a controlled explanation of the sociocultural and other contexts, a purposeful selection of material used and an erudite understanding of scholarly commentary.

Consider the next example, the third and fourth paragraphs of an essay on Section C, Part 2, Question 6. This question cited Luke 18:9–14 and then asked students to discuss how the attitudes of the tax collector are reflected in other examples of prayer in the gospel. When this response is considered alongside the criteria for the essay, this response is a highly developed, complex and insightful understanding and interpretation of a range of aspects of the topic. The complex structure of the essay is highly effective, engaging and very soundly managed. The integrated use of detail in these two paragraphs – and indeed the whole essay – is sophisticated and provides the means to justify the extensive interpretation being developed. Moreover, woven into this highly organised response is a sophisticated explanation of the sociocultural, religious and historical contexts that influenced the writing of this gospel and that affected the gospel’s original audience. Furthermore, besides having understood the role of the evangelist as both narrator at one level, and developer of a key theological theme at another, the student referred to, and quoted, scholars with precision and even compared their interpretations. All five criteria for the essay are exhibited very highly.

Furthermore, while Luke portrays the Pharisee as praying like it’s a chore and routine, as seen by him stating only general, shallow details, he contrasts this with the tax collector who is persistent and direct in his prayer. Luke highlights that his prayers aren’t vague but rather desperate and intentional, as he “beats his breast”. Therefore Luke implies to the community the persistence that should be held when praying. This is evident in Chapter 11 as Jesus teaches the parable about persevering in prayer. Luke alarms his audience by using the analogy of going to a house at “midnight” which implies that one must be willing to wake up the entire household. This suggests the boldness in prayer that must be held, as one perseveres in prayer. R.T. France supports this notion, outlining that one must “persist in prayer and never give up”; however N.T. Wright takes this to a deeper level outlining that the value of persistent prayer is not that he will hear us but that we finally hear him”. Therefore, this scholar poses that prayer doesn’t change God, it changes the individual and through this “exposure to Jesus” (Bock) individuals grow and change.

Moreover Luke highlights that prayer ultimately connects one with God and therefore enables the individual to draw power. Luke suggests to the Lukan community that prayer is the means by which God’s presence can dwell in one’s life. This is contrary to the notion prior to first century Judaism where the Temple was the way by which individuals would connect with God. Exodus 25:8 says, “Let them make a tabernacle, that I might dwell among them”. Therefore, the Hebrew people would understand that in order to connect with the most high one must physically bring themselves to the Temple. However Luke suggests through Jesus that prayer can be done anywhere, as he prays alone before every major event such as Gethsemane and the Transfiguration. In particular Luke outlines for the Lukan community in the Transfiguration how prayer allows God’s glory to transcend and how it transforms an individual. As Jesus prays he becomes pure and white and the fullness of his glory is bestowed. Therefore Luke suggests

that if Jesus relied on prayer in order to draw on God's power and glory, how much more should the average disciple. This can be compared to the tax collector who shows himself to be reliant on prayer since he perceives himself as a sinner, and therefore desperately longs for God. This is similar to what France says, encapsulating the essence of a disciple which involves "recognizing unworthiness before a sovereign God", which is emulated in the life of the tax collector. Therefore, the Lukan community is to understand that God's presence can manifest itself in them as they become spiritual temples through a recognition of unworthiness which God can come into and change.

Part 3 – Exegetical response

One of the requirements of developing an exegetical response in this study is to place the given scriptural extract for exegetical analysis within the larger set text. For some students, this becomes a sterile, formulaic series of statements, which, while demonstrating knowledge of sequence within the set texts, shows limited understanding of why this sequence is as it is, or what the purpose of the writer of the set text was in relation to both the whole text and to the original community of believers. The following introduction to Section C, Part 3, Question 9 – as an example of an opening of an exegetical response – clearly demonstrates how a student understood how the sequence of passages within a single chapter worked to create a theological message and might have impacted upon the original community. It also addresses the sociocultural and religious contexts implicit within the sequence.

The passage of Luke 18:26-43 is found toward the end of Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem (9:50 – 19:27). The pericope underlines the nature of the kingdom of God and establishes Jesus as the king of not just the Jews but the entire world, thus evoking within the Lukan community the notion that Jesus is a fulfilment of prophecy. Preceding this passage is the encounter story of the rich young ruler who is unable to give up his wealth for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This flows into 18:26-43 as people marvel that a rich man who is perceived as blessed by God is unable to inherit salvation. Through this, Luke underscores that salvation is attainable only through Jesus. Succeeding the passage, Jesus enters Jericho, and Luke continues to reinforce that Jesus' mission is to save the lost, just like the blind man. Ultimately, Luke places this pericope in order to reveal to the Lukan community the kind of faith that should be held not just individually but corporately as "they grow in an understanding of who Christ is" (Bock).

The passage takes the form of a teaching, as evident through Jesus educating his disciples about the nature of the "Kingdom of God"; however more importantly Luke transitions into the form of a healing miracle in order to show that Jesus does not only teach the Kingdom of God in words but will also reveal its nature through his actions. Through this, the Lukan community is positioned to believe that like Jesus, they too can draw on God's power and bring the elements of heaven down to earth.

Note how this introduction, purportedly and primarily on the literary context of the extract, also addressed the theme of the passage, demonstrated awareness of the evangelist's purpose, and included consideration of how the extract was designed to affect the original community. This is a very sophisticated approach. The scholar, Darrell L Bock, is then quoted, adding to the demonstration of the high skill levels of this student.

In the start to the student's second paragraph, while addressing one of the terms in bold type, there is not only awareness of literary forms and techniques, but a clear understanding of how that term contributes to the theme of the gospel and the evangelist's presentation of Jesus as both teaching about the Kingdom of God but also manifesting it through his actions. Again, this is a sophisticated response.

Consider the following extract from another exegetical analysis of Section B, Part 3, Question 8 (on Jeremiah 11:9–17). Its strength lies in the integrated way it linked some of the different criteria for Part 3 – Exegetical response.

The first major theme prevalent in this pericope is that of the nation's rebelliousness. Jeremiah attacks the Judeans claiming "a conspiracy exists among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem". Rabbi H. Freedman, biblical scholar, explains that the word "conspiracy" implies that there was a pre-meditated national pact between the Judeans in which they decided to abandon G-d and all laws of social justice, thus demonstrating the extent of their iniquity. Jeremiah clearly outlines the wrongdoings of the people claiming they "have followed other gods and served them" and directly stating "The House of Israel and the House of Judah have broken the covenant". Emphasizing the people's unfaithfulness to G-d, Jeremiah claims "For your gods have become as many as your towns". Here the prophet utilises the literary technique of hyperbole, exaggerating the situation, in order to shock the people at the number of gods they serve instead of the true G-d, and in hopes of moving them to some form of regret and repentance. Finally, when discussing the sinful state of the people Jeremiah utilises agrarian imagery, terminology associated with agriculture and viticulture to call the people "verdant olive tree, fair, and with choice fruit". The prophet compares the people to an olive tree which Freedman notes is one of the seven species special to the land of Israel, in order to show the people that just like this olive tree had so much potential to grow, flourish and produce delicious fruit, so too the Israelites could have flourished as a nation and remained close with G-d, but instead 'they have returned to the iniquities of their fathers of old, who refused to hear My words'. Jeremiah employs this agrarian imagery when prophesying to the Judeans as they would have gained a deeper understanding of the situation as it was relayed in terms that they would have been extremely familiar with living in an agrarian society.

Within this paragraph the student considered one of the set themes, 'the nation's rebelliousness'. (The next paragraph picked up another set theme.) They then used an eminent scholar, concentrating on a single word, not to define the word but to discuss what this word within a bolded phrase means within this extract. The student then drew their own interpretation of the scholar's commentary, '*... thus demonstrating ...*'. Furthermore, the student used another phrase from the extract, not one of the phrases in bold type, to back up their interpretation. Being able to link bolded words and phrases with other parts of the extract is a sophisticated skill and ensures that the explanation of the bolded word or phrase is within the 'context of the extract', as required.

All of this, together with correct use of scriptural terminology, 'pericope', happened within three sentences and addressed three of the criteria. The student then continued to examine another two bolded phrases: first, naming and then explaining the literary technique and purpose in relation to the original community of one; and second, using the scholar again to provide information, explaining the sociocultural context of the highlighted phrase, 'Verdant olive tree', thereby addressing four criteria, two in addition to those addressed earlier.

Even though this is only one paragraph, there is a sense of completeness and total control of the material evident in the question's extract by which the student demonstrated very high skill levels. The other paragraphs also integrated the skills and criteria necessary for exegesis.

Consider the following introduction to another response to Section B, Part 2, Question 8 from another student, and note its use of historical criticism – a third exegetical method – where by comparing two scholars the student suggested alternative settings of the time of writing.

Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah of priestly descent, resided in Anathoth in the tribal portion of Benjamin, and began his prophetic career in the 13th year of King Josiah's reign in 627 BCE. Chapter 11 is set in the middle of this ministry, and as according to K E Clements, Professor Emeritus of the Old Testament, in the midst of the reign of King Jehoiakim as corruption was rampant in that period, something this chapter features. Alternatively, Rabbi Dr H Freedman, teacher, translator and author of biblical commentary suggests that this message was delivered during the reign of King Josiah upon the discovery of the Deuteronomic scrolls as it highlighted how the nation had strayed in their observance of the Abrahamic Covenant, established in 2,000 BCE.

While both analysing the same extract, these two examples show different approaches to exegesis, which in turn are different in approach from the first exegetical example given on Luke 18. What all three examples did in common, however, was to approach the exegetical response as an integrated task. These students addressed each of the examination's five criteria in paragraph after paragraph. This led in each case to a thorough discussion of the selected extract using scholarly opinion, a very high level of exegetical analysis, including both sociocultural and literary contexts, and demonstration of control of appropriate scriptural and theological language.