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Please cite this publication as follows:

Bowie, R. and Coles, R. (2018) We reap what we sew: perpetuating biblical illiteracy in new English religious studies exams and the proof text binary question. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 40 (3). pp. 277-287. ISSN 0141-6200.

Link to official URL (if available):

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2018.1493270>

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We reap what we sew: perpetuating biblical illiteracy in new English Religious Studies exams and the proof text binary question.

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Abstract:

This article draws on three sources of evidence that together indicate hermeneutical weaknesses in exam courses on Christianity in English Religious Education (RE). It scrutinizes a single exam paper and an associated text book from a recent authorized course. It conceptually explores features of a new style of long Religious Studies (RS) exam question that is commonly set for the majority of students studying for a RS qualification at 15-16 years old. It combines these documentary sources with a focus group interview of teachers in the first year of teaching the new GCSE Religious Studies. The findings from the document analysis, conceptual analysis and focus group interview, together concur that there is a problem related to the use of fragmentary texts and the promotion of a particularly propositional conception of religion. These features are structured in by systemic elements. A small proportion of students follow text-based GCSE routes include a more detailed study of Biblical texts but the majority of 15-16-year-old students do not and so are exposed to this problem. These weaknesses could be ‘designed out’ of exams with smarter questions and mitigated against by curriculum content that specified the study of how texts are interpreted, as well as teacher expertise in the teaching and practice of hermeneutics.

Keywords: Bible, Christianity, hermeneutics, exams, proof-text, binary questions

Introduction and method

In English schools around 280 000 students take GCSE Religious Studies exams (JCQ CIC 2017) and Christianity is commonly studied. However, long standing well documented concerns in religious education (RE) about student understanding of Christianity, and the use and misuse of Biblical texts persist (see Bowie 2017a, 2017b and Fancourt 2017). Key features are: (1) an extensive use of fragments of texts, (2) the practice of proof texting, engaging with Bible texts mainly in the service of arguments, and (3) the failure to explore deeply how Christians engage with texts in different ways. Reed et al. notes that ‘This understanding of the Bible [proof texting] particularly undergirds the ways in which it is used in RE for pupils between 14 and 19 years of age, notably in terms of its usefulness for providing ‘answers’ to contemporary moral issues’ (2013). The poor use of fragments of texts is thought to encourage a propositional frame for all religion (Lewin 2017, see also Aldridge 2015). This decontextualized and fragmented use of scripture in RE is significantly adrift from the scholarship of biblical hermeneutics and is characteristic of poor scripture study of the past (Green 2010). This article shows how these problems continue to present themselves in secondary examinations despite reforms in 2015 that aimed to increase rigor in

new exams first sat in summer 2018. One feature of these reforms in RS was to increase the importance of sources of authority, including biblical texts, in students' writing (DfE, 2015). Students are specifically required to use biblical texts to answer long questions in Christianity exams, rather than base claims on unfounded views. Long answer questions carry most marks. Teacher's classroom practice prioritises references to texts in explanations and debates.

Text use out to be improving and such improvement is needed. An understanding of Christian engagement with texts is key to current issues of religion in the world including science and religion, diversity within interpretations of Christianity, and the use or misuse of texts for radicalizing intentions. Teaching texts is not necessarily the sole thing RE should engage with, but to do it badly has significant consequences for understanding in RE: for students to appreciate why mainstream English Churches don't read Genesis as a scientific explanation of how the universe came into being; why Christians disagree on how to read Paul's comments on women and sexuality; or why a majority of Christians would never use a fragmented Bible text to justify violence. A sound education in the ways Christians engage texts matters for a broad and deeper understanding of religion, and examinations should promote this kind of understanding.

The article identifies evidence that significant problems remain in the systems and structures of RS exams. It triangulates data from three sources. An analysis of recent examiner reports from one exam paper (last sat in 2017) alongside the exam body approved textbook confirms the presence of the identified text problems and implicates design issues in specification and textbook organisation and layout. A conceptual analysis of examples of the new GCSE long answer questions reveal a structural weakness that encourages problematic practices. Finally, a focus group of teachers in a Catholic school teaching the new GCSE, report that increased content and therefore reduced capacity for contextualising texts. Curriculum, textbook and exam question design elements are maintaining underlying problematic hermeneutical issues with texts. We do not claim that there is no good teaching around texts, or that there are no exam routes which focus more effectively on texts, but there are significant system problems affecting large numbers of students.

A study of one module's examiner reports and the approved textbook

A document analysis of the Examiners Reports for one particular unit of a now legacy GCSE RS Specification captures the near past to confirm findings from previous research as problems with the use of texts in the period 2011-2016 (after the major subject reports written by Ofsted in 2007 and 2010). The specification is anonymised in this article but every observation is grounded in specific parts of the reports. To maintain that anonymity, the associated textbook referred to here is not identified.

Annual examiners' reports published after each series of examinations (June 2011 - June 2016) review how candidates responded to the questions asked. The legacy specification took a popular thematic approach to the teaching of religion, and students' answers centre around attitudes and beliefs with the support of scriptural citation. The specification emphasises themes, not Biblical exegesis, and examination papers are evaluated on their stated aims and objectives. By their own criteria and assessment, examiners appeared happy with the overall standard of candidates understanding of religion in 2011 and 2012. Nonetheless, every report in the 2011-2016 period noted problems with the way students handled Biblical and other sacred texts.

There was the over-reliance on a small selection of quotations, mentioned every year in each report. The reports name these quotes. They tend to be commonly known phrases such as 'love your neighbour'. For example, when considering religious attitudes to fertility treatment, it is easier for a student to assert that Christians should support the technology

based on the love for others that Jesus taught his followers to show. The exam board endorsed textbook quotes 1 Samuel 1:2,5 where the narrative mentions the closing of Hannah's womb; it is harder for teachers to explore the possible theological implication of this verse when the narrative of 1 Samuel is not offered. The text book gives no commentary to contextualize this citation.

A second, linked problem noted by the examiners mentioned in 2011, 2012 and 2014 is the extent to which texts were taken out of context, or twisted, to fit a particular belief or attitude, sometimes modifying the quote for this purpose. Every examination report for the lifetime of the exam repeats an observation that students used verses out of context but this is in increasingly critical terms. In 2015 and 2016 the examiners make reference to twisting texts to non-valid interpretations. This decontextualisation of Bible texts (quoting a short verse from the Bible and hoping that it is in some way useful) became proactive misrepresentation of text. Verses were presented by students in ways incongruent to established meanings.

Each year the reports consistently mentioned these kinds of problems. Proof texting may ignore the boundaries of context and acceptable application to 'prove' a point of view, but at least it begins with a quote and a reference. In 2012 and 2014 examiners reported that students started using quotes from different religions or making up quotes. Any notion of treating religions sacred text with integrity is lost in these circumstances.

On occasions students did use accurate quotations taken from the appropriate text for the religion, but were unable to apply these to the issue under discussion. An example of this from June 2014 records student's responses to a question about equality of wealth. Some tried to apply 'an eye for an eye' without justifying how it related to equality. Though happy this verse was potentially helpful in the discussion about Christians beliefs about equality, examiners noted that the verse's relevance was not explained. To use the verse as a proof text was not satisfactory. Quoting a verse to prove a point without interpretation was insufficient.

At the end of the life of this GCSE course, examiners consistently noted these five problems:

1. Students relied on a small pool of quotations
2. Quotations were often taken out of context
3. Quotations were sometimes made up by the student
4. Quotations sometimes used to support of ideas of a different religion
5. On occasions where students did use correct quotations their relevance to the issue under discussion was not explained

Many students struggled throughout the life of this course to handle Biblical material with integrity. It is striking that any student who has engaged in the Christian faith at GCSE might finish such a course with a poor grasp of how the Bible is read and understood within Christianity. They are likely to believe proof texting is normal for Christians and teachers who have not studied Christianity at a sufficiently high level might agree.

A document study of examiners' reports cannot capture insights from lesson observations which might counter what exams reveal. The extent of proof texting in classrooms is not revealed. However, a consideration of the endorsed textbook provides some insight into the classroom. If the way that Biblical texts are handled in this resource are congruent with the way students handle it in assessed material, we might deduce that the hermeneutical assumptions of the textbook authors are passed to the candidates.

For each unit of the course, an endorsed text was published. Each book followed a common style, with six chapters, one for each of the six questions that would be asked in each exam and therein divided into about ten double-page spreads. Each double page presented material to assist with one lesson, with lesson objectives matching the

specification. Often there were definition of key terms, boxed-out Biblical quotations and a main body of writing introducing the theme and giving commentary.

A representative example has a section that introduces the concepts of sanctity of life, value of life and quality of life. When teaching the material, this book was a useful resource, concise without being over simplified and providing helpful exercises for student engagement. It introduced useful theological and philosophical concepts which the students needed to engage with to tackle the challenges that come later in the chapter. Key terms were well defined and the objectives were clear. Nonetheless, decontextualized texts appeared in the book. 1 Corinthians 3:16, printed in a yellow box out, was stated without comment or application and devoid of context. Reading this verse in the context of 1 Corinthians 3 reveals that Paul was not talking about issues of life and death when he wrote these words. The subject matter of the Paul's chapter is a mixture of unity, Christ, the roles of the Apostles, the foundation of the church and the nature of wisdom - none of this which is offered by the book to the student. It is implied that the verse is primarily about medical ethics when it is not.

Regardless of the fact that many Christians may well find themselves in agreement with the points of view explained in the pages it is unlikely these views are held solely because of this verse. The book does not show a Christian use of this text in application to this issue. It does not show a Christian reading of this verse that infers a teaching on this issue of medical ethics. It is the responsibility of the teacher to teach in ways that contextualise the content but the accredited text could be viewed as the *custodian* of every student who studies and revises beyond the limits of the classroom. In the textbook, the principle has been established. A biblical text is used to 'prove' a Christian belief without context or acknowledgment of possible limitations of the scope and application of the verse.

This single example illustrates a practice repeated throughout the book. There are many double page spreads that quote Biblical material, with some pages referencing more than one verse. On only one occasion is the quoted text referred to in any way outside of the box out. On the other occasions the Biblical quote is merely stated. Outlining a thematic idea and then presenting an uncommented, 'raw' Bible verse on the same page establishes a propositional framework and removes the possibility of a plurality of interpretations. It also presumes respect for the text always entails a doctrinal character. It evades any sense of the role of historical or theological contextualization in doctrine formulation. Hidden between the text about the issue and the biblical quotations, an unnamed, unmentioned and unscrutinised particular approach to interpreting texts is asserted.

It is not surprising that some students use fragments of texts in the ways identified in examiners reports given that the associated exam board approved textbook modelled proof texting, with little explanation given for the inclusion of quotes, often cited without a reference. This was replicated in work produced by students in exam conditions.

If a course textbook quotes Biblical passages without explicit hermeneutical work, it devalues the voice of the sacred text by reducing it to a list of quotes that can be repeated to settle a debate. Proof texting in this manner implies quoting is sufficient to win an argument. Using a Biblical text in this way robs it of ability to speak of it through narrative and evades centuries of Christian understanding around the art of reading the Bible.

While the book did not make up quotes or attributed them to the wrong religion it did rely on a small number of quotations, sometimes used out of context and sometimes without their relevance being explained. Examiners' reports note these as problems with student answers. These 'design features' of the textbook encourage a practice that is subsequently criticized by exam markers. Problems in student answers reflect the structures in the system.

The long question in new GCSE exams

The 2015 revision of specifications provided an opportunity to address these shortcomings. However further evidence suggests that far from addressing the problems, they may in fact be contributing to them. A hermeneutically framed conceptual analysis of the new long answer question structures reveals that historic problematic practices seen in the document analysis of exam papers and text book content and design are encouraged by question style.

Examiners want to see a use of texts that is reflective of their interpretation and use by Christians. However, the ways in which Christians reflect on their experience of faith and life with texts, attracts little or no content time in specifications despite the 'sources' emphasis in the DfE subject criteria (2015). Reading the exam specifications for Christianity show that although *how Christians find meaning with texts*, is necessary for the answers students will have to provide, this is an assumed knowledge, not part of the subject content in the specifications. This is significant as the inclusion of such content might prevent a practice otherwise likely to follow from the design of questions and could deepen student responses and help teachers by focusing on how Christians weigh challenges, beyond the conclusions they might reach.

The long answer questions in GCSE exams need not explicitly encourage students to make sustained focus on the ways in which a text might speak to different aspects of Christian life and faith in different ways. As most students do not study a Bible text paper option in the course, instead these questions focus on topic areas, the aspects of belief and practice, and key ideas and issues of debate. They require students to answer with reference to sources of authority. Students are expected to show different Christian responses to an issue and ground answers on a source of authority (commonly a biblical text). The principle purpose of texts in these questions is to explain or justify an argument about behaviours, attitudes, practices or beliefs. The long answer question is a good critical focal point as it draws together all of the skills tested by shorter questions but with an evaluative dimension. They are the pinnacle of the GCSE exam and secondary religious education, and, accordingly, are afforded most marks.

Students need to show knowledge and understanding of these issues and arguments in a lengthy structured body of writing. In the interests of increased rigor, the most recent change in expectation of answers to in the question has tried to make that debate more informed with an explicit emphasis on sources of authority. There were specific concerns identified in RE reports (Ofsted 2007, 2010, 2013) in this area. The basis for claims about religious belief and practice was not sufficiently specified. How common those claims were, and whether they represented a particular or significant religious position, was not sufficiently clear.

The new examinations sought to improve the quality of reasoned debate by requiring reference to reliable authoritative sources. The following examples of long questions were published by the exam boards to guide teachers preparing for the first sitting of the GCSE religious studies exam in 2018, and one is an example of an exam paper actually sat in summer 2018. They are not the only kind of question but are common and carry high value.

'If God were loving, there would be no suffering in the world.' Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you should:

- refer to Christian teaching
- give developed arguments to support this statement
- give developed arguments to support a different point of view
- reach a justified conclusion. [12 Marks]

(AQA 2016, 6)

This question presents an invitation for a detailed response exploring the problem of evil and suffering in the world. It requires the inclusion of different well-grounded perspectives in a

discussion that leads to some resolution. A similar type was actually used in the first sitting of the new exams:

‘Infant baptism is not as important as believers’ baptism.’

Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you should:

- refer to Christian teaching give developed arguments to support this statement
- give reasoned arguments to support this statement
- give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- reach a justified conclusion.’

(AQA 2018, 9)

This question has similar features to the previous one although it concerns a topic of debate in Christian practice around the two approaches to baptism. There is an expectation the students will show an understanding of the debate considering different vantage points, which would centre on what a well-reasoned practice was. The word developed is replaced by reasoned and this alludes to a requirement for a reasoned discussion that is ultimately concluded.

‘ “Evangelism should be the most important thing for Christians today.”’

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Christianity
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15 Marks] Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]’

(OCR 2016)

This question identifies a broad Christian practice as ‘most important’ as the ground for debate and asks for commonly encountered and diverse views grounded in reliable sources.

Clearly there is an integrity to the kind of discussion and resolution these questions provoke which should show depth of knowledge, a depth that extends to different perspectives, but in such away that builds a case to resolve the question. Reliable sources of evidence matter here.

However, questions like these can easily be construed as potential *proof text binary argument* questions. The GCSE curricula outlined in the specifications and guidance documentation that accompanies those specifications commonly (though not exclusively) associate certain texts with certain features of religion. The structure of questions sees texts as sources of authority to justify points of view in arguments. This binary understanding of the aspects of Christianity (and indeed other religions) is a device, an argument frame for reasoning through a debate which has some resonance with philosophical and ethical questioning, but is more problematic for textual studies where the analysis of context is a crucial factor - the intention behind a text, the narrative in which it sits, how it is perceived or framed today and what might be common or exceptional in each of these different readings. This level of analysis is not encouraged in this kind of question (and nor is it expected in other questions forms on these kinds of exam papers). Instead the question privileges argument, debate and winning, over interpretation, analysis, dialogue, nuance, uncertainty, paradox or mystery. It is much harder to include these dimensions.

It is inevitable that quotes are being learnt by students to be deployed to bolster ‘reasoned’ arguments, topic by topic, given the content to be covered. To do this, short texts must be dislocated from context, outside of narrative or story, extracted beyond questions of intention, authorial purpose, historical resonance and theological and symbolic significance.

This question form preferences reasoning and debate rather than (for example) exegetical analysis, the exploration of different interpretation of a passage, or spiritual, moral or theological reflection. Analysis is included in the service of winning arguments, a condition observed by Cooling et al. (2016). Teachers are implicitly directed to encourage students to learn how to build chains of arguments for justified points of view providing evidence with reference to sources of authority. The question expects students to rehearse arguments and engage texts as carriers of meanings to justify (preferably oppositional) positions in argument with one another to reach a justified judgement, constituting evaluation.

How those texts are actually engaged by Christians is not directly supported by significant curriculum content, even though the use of those texts is a requirement of the questions. A new GCSE text book sought to counter this through reference to the place of scripture, tradition and reason in Christian decision making and authority (Towey and Robinson 2016, pp. 7-9) but the question design does not help elicit that knowledge. As a result, there is a meta content embedded and framed in the question structures and expected kinds of answers that is imposed on the religious content and which teachers themselves have to manage. That meta content implicitly preferences a propositional practice of text use and implicitly reinforces a propositional concept of religion which others have criticised (Lewin 2017).

Question design unintentionally encourages proof texting and privileges a binary argument. It serves the examination of religious texts in limited ways because that is not its intention. Placing logical reasoning at the heart of the general enquiry in religion, faith and life, things which might also, or be better characterized by reflection on paradox and mystery, is a normative feature of the exams young people take, but it should be recognized as controversial. There is a hidden curriculum of what arguments are valued as reasonable, and what uses of texts are legitimate.

Teacher experience

The hypothesis that the problems around text use are produced by factors in the design of questions is not something that has been systematically tested across all exam options. There might be external cultural factors driving the representation of religion and religious texts in these directions. However, an additional source of data is the perception of teachers, and the extent to which they feel their teaching is shaped and framed or distorted by the structures of the exams they prepare young people to take.

No large-scale evaluation of teacher perception of GCSE Religious Studies has been published (at time of writing) but this article reports findings from a small scale qualitative focus group of seven teachers in their first year of the new GCSE, teaching in a Catholic girls' state school in the southeast of England. The focus group was held in the school, with the Headteacher's permission, and was recorded and transcribed for analysis. The questions were semi structured and began with open questions about their experience of teaching the new GCSE. All gave consent. They were shown a copy of the quotes for use in this article. A small selection of responses are included but they are indicative of much of the conversation.

The focus group, conducted toward the end of teaching the first year of a new GCSE specification, reveals evidence supporting the hypothesis that the new specifications perpetuate the problems:

‘They don't fully understand the text that we're using either because although we get them to understand why that text teaches that about that topic ... you haven't got time to really go into details of exactly what was happening previously, what was happening afterwards, what was the political situation ... I don't think they'll ever

really truly understand the quote because they only know that says that about that topic.’ (participant 1)

Here the concern is the loss of contextual information and the implicit assertion that the meaning of the text is related to one particular theme. Two other participants identify this problem of using texts as pretexts in the practice of using texts to make arguments:

‘And we live in a world where people pick and choose scripture to justify really good things but really awful things as well.’ (participant 2)

‘I think even if you look at the Conquistadors or you look at South Africa yes people use biblical texts. If you look at the Ku Klux Klan they use biblical texts. They use it completely out of context and we would understand it’s out of context. I would prefer them to have a context rather than just you’re going to need to use this quote to justify this.’ (participant 3)

A fourth participant specifically elaborated on a particular example of what the loss of context meant and how, as she saw it, deeper more important meanings were lost in the service of arguments about the topic. This came from a training day:

‘I think it’s the exam from Incarnation again, the use of Luke 1.44 for why we should be against abortion which is taken from Mary meeting Elizabeth, the Magnificat, that event is not about saying why we shouldn’t abort babies really. I understand how we’re using that quote in that way, but all we’re doing with them is ‘that’s why we should do this’ so they have no understanding of the Magnificat, of the significance of that, you don’t get to talk about the fact that Luke gives to a woman this declaration of who Christ is, we’re just going to say this tells us about why we should protect the unborn.’ (participant 4)

This case is particularly powerful given the significance of the Magnificat in the role the Gospel writer gives a woman; It is in stark contrast to the use of the text in a debate about women’s reproductive rights. Were such students to continue to A Level they might encounter feminist theological readings that challenge the kind of practice they had been taught for their GCSE. There was a palpable sense of injustice in the tone of participant 4. A text that raised the status of women was here being encouraged to be used for something quite different.

A clear concern expressed directly by the teachers in the focus group was that the increased content in the GCSE was squeezing out the time to understand the context of the bible texts used. They felt very strongly about this indeed and feared for what would be lost. One teacher commented that they used to spend many lessons on abortion but now they only had one lesson. They deeply resented what they saw as a requirement to use the texts in ways they viewed as intellectually illegitimate.

Many of the teachers in the group commented specifically on the issue of texts. Some had recently been to professional development on the new specification where the use of sources of authority was a key topic. The impression given to the interviewer was that these seven teachers were scholars of their subject. Their expressions felt like resentment that they were being required to do something they construed as a professionally and academically inappropriate. These teachers were being interviewed during the first year of new GCSE and A Level exams, with the inevitable implications for additional workload, and we might expect change and development over time as they become accustomed to the new exams. Nevertheless, the specific and detailed nature of their concerns were compelling, and their concerns were that they could not see how they might respond to these particular challenges.

Previous Ofsted data suggested problematic use of texts in RE but this was based on surveys of the non-Catholic school sector - government reports did not include Catholic schools. However, the teachers interviewed were in a Catholic school doing a Catholic paper. It is possible that the new GCSE exams has led to 'contagion' into the Catholic sector, if the issues weren't already present there by virtue of the exam question designs or text book practices.

The school where interviews were held was not following a GCSE pathway that included the study of a Gospel. It could be that schools following that pathway have a different experience from those interviewed. A bigger study of teacher perceptions would test how widespread these feelings are. Nevertheless, the findings are consistent with the document analysis of examiners reports and the conceptual analysis of the new long answer question. What they add is a question about the amount of content and how that adds to text problems as it reduces time to provide context limiting the scope teachers have to mitigate the worst of the problems.

Conclusion

There is greater confidence around findings when similar patterns emerge from studies that use different methods. The document analysis, conceptual enquiry and qualitative interviews outlined in this paper, have each sustained the hypothesis that there is an ongoing problem with how texts are engaged and used in RE. Specified content, exam questions, and text books inadvertently contribute to a limited use of texts with unintended consequences for understanding. At worst religions are encountered as bundles of propositions based on proof texts.

How Christians engage texts in different ways, and why Churches might come to different conclusions about key practices and issues, or arguably more significantly, how the majority of Christians themselves engage with the Bible, deserve better attention as they impact on key areas of understanding. Otherwise students may be given the impression Christians arbitrarily pluck out Biblical quotes to defend points of view or practices, and in teaching them of these differences preference literal interpretations and show diversity by including multiple contradictory literal interpreters. Elsewhere Bowie (2017) has written about the contrast between classroom RE use of texts and the role they play in the spiritual life of Christians. RE may be drifting towards a particularly narrow, and for many Christians unrepresentative characterization of Christianity. The reasoned argument question (or more disparagingly, the binary proof text question) may suit popular debates in religion and belief but they do not demonstrate to students a sufficiently representative account of religious engagement with texts and are far removed from scripture scholarship.

Questions requiring an analysis of longer extracts with an emphasis on establishing if students understand the different ways Christians engage Bible texts and whether they can demonstrate those approaches might help. This should be possible even when students are not studying a text-focussed paper. Specifications and exams could encourage more focus on longer passages, and explicitly include some content on different Christian approaches to 'reasoning'. This could encourage students to engage the nature and significance of the different ways Christians engage texts: allegorically, literally, spiritually, morally, theologically and personally - important factors to help students analyze religion, before any evaluation.

Certain caveats and counterpoints should be noted. Documentary analysis and even analysis of resources and examination reports does not present an account of what is happening in classrooms. This research identified some new concerns from teachers themselves but this was a small sample size in the first year of teaching working with the new exams. RE teachers, once they have adapted to the new GCSEs, might adjust to mitigate

against the hermeneutical weaknesses. Not all exam boards are the same in their use of certain kinds of question. There are examples of long answer questions which do not use such an overly structured approach (see for example Eduqas, 2018, 4). Some students do follow a text pathway, though the majority do not. Finally, some will say hermeneutics is too ambitious for secondary schools. However, if primary students can debate how different titles change the sense of a parable, such as the Good Samaritan (and they can), then secondary students at GCSE level can also do hermeneutics. They ought to be able to consider the question, ‘Who was Paul’, ‘Who were the Corinthians’ and ‘Why might he have said such a thing to the Corinthians’ as well as ‘How might this text be read alongside others by different Christian communities today?’. Better hermeneutics would, at the very least, address the use of fragments.

This paper is specifically concerned that structural factors of the system disincentivize teachers from scholarly engagements with texts. The structures seem to encourage bad examples that repeat old problems well known from previous research. Further work needs to be done to establish how widespread the reported experiences of teachers, whether the problems identified by examiners continue, and whether differently structured questions change practice. This is important if RE is to be scholarly. As Green comments, the one consensus in biblical scholarship in present times is the importance of context, “A text without context is little more than a pretext.” (2011, 13). GCSE Religious Studies should be more than a space for the delivery of pretexts.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. This article was developed by papers given at a number of research conferences in 2016 and 2017 in England, The Netherlands and Malta.

Notes on Contributors

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