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History 7042  
Specimen Question Paper 1B (A-level)  
Question 02  
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

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**Specimen answer plus commentary**

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

**Paper 1B (A-level): Specimen question paper**

**02** To what extent did Ferdinand and Isabella deserve their titles of 'the Catholic monarchs'?

**[25 marks]**

**Student response**

The marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella in October 1469 and the later accession of them both to Castile (Isabella, 1474) and Aragon (Ferdinand, 1479) united the two largest provinces within Spain giving the peninsula a new strength. Ferdinand and Isabella promoted Spain as a leader of Christian Europe against the Infidel and were rewarded with the title of Los Reyes Católicos by Pope Alexander VI in 1494. As joint monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella helped to strengthen the power and position of the monarchy, all the while proclaiming that they were working for God and the Church. This was not unique among the monarchs of Europe, but in Spain religion was particularly important in justifying policies and as a source of unity in the previously divided peninsula.

The previous policy of convivencia (toleration of other faiths and ethnic groups) was abandoned as the Catholic monarchs adopted more extreme policies. Whereas previously Christians, Jews and Muslims had lived amicably alongside one another, Isabella, who was particularly known for her piety, determined to take action to enforce the Christian Catholic religion. In 1478 Pope Sixtus VI issued a papal Bull approving the use of the Spanish Inquisition and giving the Catholic monarchs the power to appoint Inquisitors. This initially applied only to Castile but its use was gradually extended elsewhere in the peninsula. The creation of the inquisition was initially to investigate Jews who had converted to Christianity (conversos) amidst rumours that their conversions were not genuine. From this it was a small step towards investigating any non-Christians or any whose background suggested they may not be true believers.

The Spanish Inquisition was used to persecute Jews and in this way Ferdinand and Isabella showed their 'Catholic' credentials. Jews had been portrayed as Christ-killers in medieval times and pogroms against them were a way of showing Catholic zeal and uniting Spanish Christians. By 1492, when all Jews were expelled from Castile, around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Castilian and Aragonese Jews had left the peninsula and it was this dedication that led to their award of the 'Los Reyes Católicos' title by the Pope. Whether they deserved such praise is another matter. The expulsion of the Jews is controversial, not only on religious grounds but also for the loss of money and skills that went with the Jewish expulsions -which were extended to Aragon shortly afterwards

It was perhaps natural for the 'Catholic Monarchs' to want to complete the Reconquista of the whole of the Iberian peninsula for Christianity. This had been gradually undertaken in an attempt to drive out Muslims who had once dominated much of Spain in medieval times and by the 1480s only Granada in the south remained as an 'emirate' under Islamic rule. The conquest of Granada between 1482 and 1492 under Cordoba was undertaken in an effort to 'expel from all Spain the enemies of the Catholic faith and dedicate Spain to the service of God'. The Pope confirmed the religious importance of the war by granting a cruzada tax in 1482 for the war effort, and religious imagery was used on the army's banners. The successful reconquista was

hailed as a triumphal crusade against Islam although Archbishop Talavera initially offered some hope of reconciliation in the area.

Living up to their title as 'Catholic monarchs', Granada was increasingly subjected to 'catholicisation'. The area was settled with Catholic peasants from Andalucia in the 1490s and Archbishop Cisneros reversed earlier policies by forcing the conversion of the native Mudejars. The inquisition was extended to Granada and, in 1499, the wearing of Muslim costume and the use of the Arabic language was banned. This led to revolts by the Mudejars but these were savagely repressed. By 1501 it was declared that all Granadan Mudejars must convert or leave, and by 1502 any unconverted moors were expelled. Even those who chose to convert to Christianity and became known as Moriscos were suspiciously thought of and subject to investigation by the inquisition. In 1494 Pope Alexander VI granted the Catholic monarchs a further 'honour' with the right to lead a crusade against the Muslim kingdom of Fez in Morocco. A series of largely successful expeditions took place between 1505 and 1515 and were in part planned and organised by Archbishop Cisneros. Once again these expeditions seemed to confirm the Catholic monarchs' status although they also had the secondary purpose of promoting trade

Ferdinand and Isabella had shown themselves to be 'the most Catholic Monarchs', even if their conquests were expensive and the economy of Granada suffered from the loss of industrious Mudejars. The wars helped to cultivate the idea of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) which enforced a sense of patriotism and unification amongst the Spanish and they increased the power and prestige of the joint monarchy and strengthened the relationship between the Crown, church and nobility with a shared common goal. This had the result of reducing the independent power of Church and nobility as a threat to the crown.

Whilst the Pope was behind much that the Catholic monarchs did, Ferdinand and Isabella's independent action and the Pope's recognition of the Monarchs' supreme headship actually strengthened the Crown as much as the Catholic Church in general. This was reinforced by reform within the Catholic Church of Spain which strengthened the Spanish Church in the face of European anti-clericalism and prevented it succumbing to Protestant criticism after Ferdinand's death in 1516. Isabella's confessor, Cisneros, who was appointed as Archbishop of Toledo in 1495 and Inquisitor General in 1502 was instrumental in this work.

Possibly Cisneros, more than the monarchs themselves, deserves the title of 'the most Catholic' since it was he who persuaded the Catholic monarchs to drop the policy of *convivencia* and who organised and carried out most of the ecclesiastical reform. Cisneros improved the state of the clergy, ordering Bishops to reside in their sees and supervise those under their care. He also forced parish priests to abandon mistresses, preach sermons and wear appropriate clerical dress. In addition, Cisneros established the University of Alcalá in 1508 and was involved in the compiling the Polygot Bible which would be published in 1522. He helped to extend Catholic education and patronised religious scholars such as Peter Martyr of Angtiera, 1488 and Atonia de Nebrija, 1476. In carrying out this reform, he was helped by the extension of the printing press to all major cities in the 1480s.

It was the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, however, who helped fund Columbus' discovery of the New World in 1492 and so increased Spain's universal political and religious dominance. In 1508, the Pope declared them patronata of South America and whilst there were financial motives behind colonisation, religion was always made the most prominent factor. The Crown's vigorous religious policy extended to Greece where they gained Italian support in 1501

after helping Venice re-acquire the fortress of St. George in Cephalonia from the Turks and also to Otranto where they contributed 70 ships to help expel the Turks. As well as strengthening the prestige of Ferdinand and Isabella as Los Reyes Católicos, their religious measures led to alliances which brought practical advantages, most significantly membership of the Holy League which, along with the Treaty of Medina del Campo 1489, helped Ferdinand secure Cerdagne and Roussillon in 1493 and Navarre in 1512, thus protected the Northern frontier of Spain from invasion.

Ferdinand and Isabella were rightly coined Los Reyes Católicos as they helped make Spain the leader of Christian Europe. However, much of their religious 'propaganda' shielded more earthly motives for action and the need to strengthen their own power and unify the kingdom were always present in whatever they did. They actually succeeded in curbing the independent power of the Church in Spain, as well as in uniting and enlarging their kingdoms and this would suggest that the power and position of the monarchy were actually their most important driving forces. Whilst others, particularly Cisneros, were important in religious policies, the overall conclusion must be that Ferdinand and Isabella were deserving of their title.

### **Commentary – Level 5**

This is a very good answer which closely examines the extent to which the title was 'deserved'. It has appropriate range and is consistently relevant and analytical with effective supporting detail. It also argues some qualification to the role of the Monarchs and suggests other reasons for the religious policies pursued. These could, however, have been further developed to enhance the balance of argument. It is, then, a Level 5 answer, but not at the top of the level.