

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/03 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 3 series overview

This paper explores aspects of the development of Christian theology. Success in this paper comes from a broad understanding of Christianity as well as the ability to go deeper into particular areas.

A full range of candidate responses was seen in this session. The questions covered a broad range of the specification and candidates generally showed good coverage of the material. There was some suggestion that, where areas being tested were sub-sections of the specification, candidates sometimes were seen to answer in more general terms, rather than responding directly and clearly to the question set.

Some scripts were very short indeed and, although the content might have been relevant, these candidates did not give themselves time to engage fully with the question.

There was adequate use of theological terms, although confusion about the meaning – and spelling – of core terms within Christian theology held some candidates back. Handwriting varied once more and some scripts were difficult to decipher.

Key point

Candidates need to answer the specific question set, rather than talking generally about areas within the topic.

Excellent responses did not need to be extremely long – examiners are aware of the time constraints in writing essays as much as the time constraints on teachers delivering the specification – but focused, AO2-driven essays tended to attract the highest marks.

In all your responses, you should:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including:
 - knowledge and understanding of religious thought and teaching
 - influence of beliefs, teachings and practices on individuals, societies and communities
 - cause and significance of similarities and differences in belief, teaching and practice
 - approaches to the study of religion and belief.
- analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief, including their significance, influence and study.

Question 1

1* Critically discuss Jesus' parable of The Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31–46).

[30]

Candidates used their freedom to explore any aspect of the parable to good effect. There were some responses that focused deeply on judgement or election or the nature of heaven and hell and others that showed a broad range of understanding, evaluating as the essay progressed. Some candidates used the thinking of scholars to develop their responses but equally acceptable were approaches that explored academic approaches – that is, the views that scholars might take. Weaker responses did not show a clear understanding of the content of the passage – for example, including too much on purgatory, which does not feature in the text (without explaining that the absence of purgatory in the text could need some discussion), or writing about heaven and hell without demonstrating or engaging with what the parable says about heaven and hell.

Exemplar 1

Jesus' parable of the Sheep and the Goats helps to illustrate ideas about Heaven and Hell, but it appears to contradict the views of scholars such as Paul Tillich and N. T. Wright, as well as not supporting the Roman Catholic belief in Purgatory.

The response demonstrates an essay – which went on to receive full marks – that sets up the boundaries for the discussion very clearly at the outset in the introduction. The inclusion of scholars' names is not required: the candidate could simply have said 'it appears to contradict the views of scholars who say...'

Question 2

2* 'Jesus' miracles demonstrate that he was the Son of God.' Discuss.

[30]

Many candidates engaged widely with the question of miracles and their validity in demonstrating that Jesus was the Son of God. There were good discussions seen about the truth of the miracles in the Bible and the uniqueness of Jesus as miracle worker, both in the context of first-century magicians and given the miracles performed by others in the Bible. Many candidates, however, answered slightly different questions: either comparing the three part of the specification (Jesus as wisdom teacher, liberator and Son of God) or talking about whether other aspects of Jesus demonstrated that he was the Son of God (and therefore not focusing on the miracles).

Exemplar 2

It's arguable that rather than being the son of God, Jesus was simply a moral teacher, and liberator and nothing more. In the Bible, there are many clear examples of Jesus being portrayed as both a challenge to political authority and religious authority.

Jesus was portrayed as being associated with groups who presented challenges to the Roman law and authority at the time and his threat to political authority was further highlighted by his arrest and crucifixion by Pontius Pilate. These biblical examples already show Jesus as a challenge to political authority and Terry Astor further reinforces this idea, arguing that he was even more of a political liberator than presented in the Bible, even using his violence to challenge political leaders. This highlights Jesus as a important liberating figure.

The response is from a candidate who, having written coherently about miracles for two pages, lost focus and began to write about Jesus the liberator – quite a typical deviation. While this material could have been linked to the question (e.g. by saying that the miracles show Jesus' liberation of outcasts, rather than his divinity), this opportunity was not taken.

Question 3

3* Assess the view that Bonhoeffer's theology puts too much emphasis on suffering.

[30]

There were some excellent discussions about Bonhoeffer's theology of discipleship, costly grace and his interpretation of Jesus' instruction to take up one's cross. However, many responses spoke more generally about Bonhoeffer's theology and therefore found it difficult to engage fully with the question. Some candidates took the idea of suffering to refer to the influence of Nazism and the suffering caused at Bonhoeffer's time but this did not tend to engage with the question set. There were some responses that were simply biographical accounts of Bonhoeffer's life. Reference to 'religionless Christianity' and the implications for challenging secular values were rare, although implicitly this could be found in some essays that explored civil disobedience (without focusing the entire response on this aspect). The best answers looked at the theme of suffering in his theology through various lenses rather than taking an historical line.

Exemplar 3

Detailed Bonhoeffer states a difference between cheap and costly grace. Cheap grace would be something you wouldn't have to give anything up for. Costly grace is an action where you give absolutely everything up. Bonhoeffer experienced costly grace - however true

One of the most common misunderstandings in essays on Bonhoeffer has been the distinction between cheap and costly grace. It is worth candidates considering how they will explain the difference between the two in the context of the Christian's attitude towards God's grace – is it seen cheaply or is the cost of that grace fully embraced by the Christian? The response shows a common misunderstanding that Bonhoeffer believed in two different types of grace.

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