# An example of a 15 Mark Question Response J625/06

## November 2020 Q3d

‘It is impossible to be an absolute pacifist in the 21st Century’.

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

* Draw on your learning from across your course of study, including reference to beliefs teachings and practices within Christianity
* Explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Christianity.

An absolute pacifist is a person who believes that violence is always wrong and that at no time should violence ever be used. So, an absolute pacifist would not fight back if attacked and if there was a war, they would refuse to do anything that harmed the people attacking them.

Some Christians believe absolute pacifism was taught by Jesus and that the principle is even found in the Old Testament. For example, a prophet speaks about beating weapons into farm tools and of a time when nations will not go to war at all. More support for the view is found in some of the things Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about the peacemakers being blessed. Of course, he didn’t attempt to fight back when he was arrested. The first Christians would not fight in the Roman army.

On the other hand, for many centuries, Christians have been involved in wars and the idea of a Just War (thought up by St Thomas Aquinas) means they feel they can retaliate if attacked, even though it will mean killing and injuring people. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian pastor, during WWII wanted to be pacifist and he struggled with the problem. In the end he decided that violence could be justified if it led to a better outcome. In his case killing Hitler, so the war would end sooner with less loss of life.

Other Christians take the view that being peaceful is an ideal but in an imperfect world it cannot be fully achieved. Some would argue that by being a pacifist a person is actually accepting that violence against them is right. If a pacificist does nothing, then evil will win every time. Surely a Christian can’t accept that. Sometimes retaliation in proportion according to the Just War theory for example, is necessary.

Some Christians would say that the Just War theory and the idea of pacifism are outdated and belong to a time when armies fought each other, leaving ordinary people out of the fight, sometimes. 21st Century war is not like that. Weapons are used that don’t just kill soldiers but a cause mass destruction. Even if attempts are made to avoid civilian casualties, the conflicts always spill over into the lives of innocent people who are made refugees, losing their homes and often losing their lives. A pacifist may believe they are doing the right thing by not taking part in the killing of the aggressor but in the end by doing nothing, aren't they helping to cause suffering for the innocent? Surely, they are in the wrong because they are not doing anything to stop the violence.

A possible response to that view could be that Jesus told his followers to love their enemies and be peacemakers. If no one tries break the cycle of violence it will go on for ever.

There is a view that being a pacifist goes against human nature. Violence and the need to fight back is just part of the human make up and whilst it needs to be controlled it can never be got rid of completely. Perhaps Christians who believe in absolute pacifism are hopelessly over optimistic about how humans can learn to behave.

In conclusion, it seems that it might be possible to be an absolute pacifist even in the 21st century. Pacificists could assist the war effort in peaceful ways such as they did in WWI and WWII, as stretcher bearers or by working in key industries but not weapon factories. Christian absolute pacifists believe they are fulfilling what Jesus taught and therefore are being very good Christians, in the hope that war and violence and a be stopped because of their attitude. From another point of view though they could in fact be allowing evil to win by not challenging it in the way that 21st century warfare needs. They could be failing their fellow humans by holding to their belief in absolute pacificism, which seems un-Christian.

### Commentary

Taking account of the of age the candidate and the time constraints of the exam, the response matches the description of a good response for both AO1 and AO2. The response fulfils the requirement of the question rubric to explain and evaluate the importance of points of view from the perspective of Christianity. There is also evidence of reference to beliefs teachings and practices within Christianity.

### For AO1

There is a gooddemonstration of knowledge and understanding in response to the stimulus. The introductory statements show this and the line of argument throughout the response keeps to the issue in the stimulus. There is good religious knowledge displayed or alluded to with references to teachings in the Bible, words of Jesus and the theory of the Just War. These are also good examples of sources of wisdom and authority. Differences in view and attitudes amongst Christians are acknowledged and explored. All the bullet points at Level 4 are addressed at that level.

### For AO2

The response begins with a clear explanation of the meaning of the term ‘absolute pacifist’. A variety of viewpoints are then explored. Each view is explained and considered demonstrating evidence of reasoned argument and some discussion as the points of view follow in a logical order making the response a coherent discussion.

The view of some Christians that violence is always wrong is considered and supported with appropriate evidence from the Bible and the early history of the behaviour of Christians in the Roman Empire. This view is contrasted with the fact of Christian involvement in war and violence supported by reference to the Just War theory. A third view that pacifism may in fact contribute to greater suffering is expressed and is the focus of the argument in the later parts of the response. There are further references to Jesus’ teaching which seems to support pacifism (love one’s enemy). General observations about human nature which suggest that it will always be an impossible struggle to get people to be peaceful towards each other and the character of modern warfare as involving civilians as well as soldiers are made to support the overall thrust of the discussion.

The final paragraph is a good conclusion to the discussion with some well-judged comments which pick up on points made in earlier parts of the response.

Checking the response against the bullet points on the levels of response, Level 4 seems to be most appropriate as a variety of viewpoints are explored with good use of reasoned argument. There is only some discussion however, which could suggest that aspect of the response is more appropriately judged as Level 3.

By addressing and commenting on several viewpoints, it is fair to observe that there is evidence of critical evaluation including comment on, and comparison of arguments from different Christian groups. There is no need for the response to refer to particular groups by name as pacifist views are to be found amongst the followers of almost all Christian denominations.

There is evidence of evaluation of the significance and/or influence of the issue on different Christian groups in paragraph 5 where the potential negative effect of a pacifist approach is mentioned and in paragraph 6 where Jesus words to his followers about loving one’s enemies, to some Christians seem to be unequivocal support for pacifism as does his lack of retaliation at his arrest which is in noted paragraph 2.

The final paragraph is good judgement on the issue in the stimulus and a balanced conclusion to the discussion.

As this is Question 3, the response can also be judged against the strapline for extended writing at Level 4. ***There is a well-developed and sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant and logically structured.***

Taking the response as a whole, it can be judged as good and therefore Level 4. All the bullet points at that level have been met sufficiently. The final mark to be awarded in an exam session would reflect the decisions about performance of candidates across the cohort, after consideration of a substantial number of responses at the standardisation meeting.

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