

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/03 Summer 2023 series

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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. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. 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.

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Paper 3 series overview

The cohort who sat this paper had been through many disruptions to their education but it was important to set a marking standard that mirrored previous years to ensure continuity for examiners in understanding what constituted a 'good' or an 'excellent' (for example) response.

With this continuity, however, came a slightly different pattern of mark awarding with a significant number of essays being marked in a much higher level for AO2 than for AO1. Essentially, this means that there was a useful discussion about the issues raised by the question but less real unpacking of the core theology or thinking behind the question. So, responses to Question 1 often only mentioned grace through repetitions of the wording of the question, rather than explaining what Augustine's view of grace might have been; Question 2 often had three paragraphs on exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, without showing sufficient understanding of 'anonymous Christians'; and so on. It is difficult to tell whether this is an issue of question practice, over-reliance on paragraph structures that do not emphasise AO1, commitment of material to long-term memory, over-reliance on pre-prepared essays, or something different.

The use of practice questions might also assist with other trends seen, such as building up the habit of writing for 38-40 minutes, the development of good handwriting and effective use of a short moment's planning before beginning to write.

Some candidates seemed overly fixated with trying to make synoptic links or to name as many scholars as they could.

Misconception



It is a misconception that naming lots of scholars automatically gains higher marks. It is often sufficient to argue a point in general terms, rather than knowing exactly which scholars have posited it: this is covered by the phrases 'scholarly views' and 'academic approaches' in the levels of response.

It is a further misconception that making synoptic links is a key to success. While many topics naturally overlap (within and between papers 1, 2 and 3), candidates are able to achieve full marks on any question simply by answering the question very effectively.

This led to certain scholars appearing in any of the four questions – sometimes appropriately, but needlessly, and sometimes feeling more like they had been shoehorned in. Augustine, Bonhoeffer, Dawkins, Freud and Marx were all seen in all four questions.

As always, there is a need for those approaching this paper to be able to 'think like a Christian theologian', which is distinct from the skills required for Paper 1 and Paper 2. The ability to place oneself in the shoes of different types of Christians, to understand the power and importance of faith in a God that they believe self-reveals, the true significance to Christians of Jesus, the relevance of the Bible and tradition and so on are essential skills that often distinguish the best candidates from those less effective.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• answered the question set specifically• focused on the words in the question, rather than words from the topic as a whole• backed up their arguments with developed and relevant theology• showed an awareness of Christianity as a living entity that has (and continues to) inspired many but which is a complex religion• engaged with (and planned) essays with AO2 as the thrust but made space for relevant AO1 throughout.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wanted to use material that was not fully relevant to the question• wrote only a paragraph or two (however long) exploring a strength and a weakness• went off into tangents using other areas of the specification• did not offer sufficient AO1 in their responses• wrote illegibly or in an unstructured way.

Question 1*

1* Assess Augustine's claim that **only** God's grace can overcome human sin.

[40]

While candidates generally recalled Augustine's view on Original Sin and its effects, as well as a range of different approaches to what essential human nature is like (if it exists), it was noticeable that candidates were often not as secure in their understanding of God's grace, either for Augustine or for Christians today. A number of candidates tried to write too much about Bonhoeffer, exposing gaps in their understanding of cheap and costly grace, e.g. the misconception that they are two different types of grace that God gives. While Bonhoeffer did attract credit at AO2, it was possible to focus the entire question on Augustine for success. Some candidates, in trying to discuss Augustine on grace, explored his views on election, which was either done very successfully or else was too unfocused on the question.

The best responses explored the idea of God's grace as unmerited, identified Jesus as an outworking of this grace and often explored the debate with Pelagius as the context for the debate, although other approaches were equally successful, including those based in Biblical texts. A few excellent responses explored the difference between the Reformed tradition and other Christian traditions. Less successful responses saw Jesus' sacrifice as an alternative to grace.

Some candidates explored the idea that grace must be accepted (received) in some way and explored the human response to grace and sometimes the role of the Church. Others explored the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (a set text) or other formulations of the idea that salvation (broadly understood as overcoming human sin) is achieved through works. The subtlety that, for some Christians, even those with faith, let alone works, will not overcome the effects of Original Sin was noted by some excellent responses.

Assessment for learning



It might be worth unpacking the idea of grace in some detail both in terms of specific approaches (Augustine and Bonhoeffer are mentioned on the specification) and in terms of other Christian approaches.

Exemplar 1

Due to the Fall, Augustine also believes that our will has been split, which makes us sin. Augustine doesn't believe that we seek towards sin but we are drawn to it. Lvt is an example ~~of~~ Augustine gives to show how we've lost this control. He says men have lost the ~~control of~~ ability to control ~~when they~~ the desire to have sexual intercourse. This shows, at least to Augustine, that only God's grace is able to help overcome human sin. For example in the 'Our Father' prayer, ~~as~~ we pray 'protect ~~us from~~ those who trespass against us and lead us not to temptation

but deliver us from evil.' Here we are asking God to protect us ~~from~~ from being tempted ~~to sin~~ towards sinful behaviour.

Additionally, Augustine believes everyone has original human sin as this is passed down ~~through us~~ through generations. Everyone birthed has human sin, that we cannot get away from due to the Fall. Therefore only God's grace can help us overcome this.

However, other would disagree with Augustine. ~~Thomas~~, for example believed that 'Rousseau', ~~but~~ for example, believed that we are born free but get chained up. This simply means that it is society that makes us the way we are. So in this case, where

		infact we are not neccessarily born sinful,
		God's grace it won't be the only thing that
		could overcome human sin. If it if down

This exemplar is a typical response to Question 1. It can be seen that no real exploration of grace has taken place and that there are simply repeats of the question throughout. The material is typical of various different questions on Augustine and perhaps could have been better selected for the particular question that came up this year.

Question 2*

2* 'Anonymous Christians can also receive salvation.' Discuss.

[40]

The vast majority of responses attributed the term 'anonymous Christians' to Rahner and asserted that anonymous Christians are those who live a Christian lifestyle without realising it. Essays then tended to explore the three approaches to the theology of religions: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, usually in three equally sized paragraphs and sometimes with no further mention of anonymous Christians, until the conclusion. A few weaker responses guessed at what an anonymous Christian might be (a secret charity worker or someone who wants to keep their Christianity private).

Better responses explored more fully what Rahner's thinking might have been and his desire to reconcile the benevolence of God with the Catholic notion of there being no salvation outside of the Church. The idea of anonymous Christianity was also sometimes explored as was the need to locate salvation for Old Testament figures.

Some candidates made good use of the Biblical texts, not only those from the specification (the Sheep and the Goats, the Good Samaritan and the Lost Son are all potentially relevant here) but also other texts that constitute useful discussion about the topic. Paul's speech in Athens was also used, often to excellent effect.

Discussion of the question usually included the idea that the concept of anonymous Christians (or Christianity) is potentially offensive to other faiths, although few explored the linked idea of the challenges of believing in one objective truth that needs to be shared for the eternal good of many. Some candidates limited themselves by simply discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each of pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism without focusing on the question. It is worth noting that repeating the question at the end of each paragraph does not necessarily constitute a focus on the question in the essay itself. Some candidates assumed that because pluralism must be correct (because, in their worldview, all views are permissible), inclusivism must also be correct.

Exemplar 2

one reason why salvation must also be accessible to anonymous Christians is because of the necessity of an Inclusionist theological approach to Christian "eternal" salvation. Inclusionism is a theory regarding salvation that argues although Christianity is the only path to "true religion" - there are other faiths which share key aspects of Christianity which mean that if a person with no knowledge of Jesus follows these beliefs, such as worshipping an abrahamic god they must receive salvation as an anonymous Christian. The thinker Karl Rahner effectively argues that in lieu of other methods of salvation if a person is ignorant of Jesus - an anonymous Christian must logically exist as a path to salvation to ensure salvation is accessible to all. This argument Rahner provides is evidenced by the biblical event of the "harroing of hell" - where Jesus provides salvation to "anonymous Christians who were born before the salvation such as Abraham and Moses. This effectively demonstrates anonymous Christians can receive salvation. This argument

Exemplar 2 is an extract from an essay that gave a greater than usual emphasis on anonymous Christians. Although the essay as a whole did not achieve full marks, this first main paragraph nicely illustrates the range and depth of material that should be explored when studying this topic.

Question 3*

3* 'Christians must challenge secular views of gender roles.' Discuss.

[40]

This question was different from the other three on the paper inasmuch as the AO1 was often more detailed than the AO2. Huge amounts of knowledge, scholarly views and key debates on the feminist agenda were presented but sometimes without reference to the question. Some candidates did not quite understand what secular meant in this context and either tried to put forward pre-prepared material from the secularism topic (for example, census results, Freud and Dawkins) or thought that secular meant 'their own' in some sense. As a result, some responses simply argued that Christianity is outdated or flipped the question to discuss why secular views should challenge outdated Christian view.

Another concern that came out of this question was the very naïve perspective taken by some candidates about Christianity. A number of scripts were seen where Christians were dismissed as abusive, anti-woman, anti-progress or incompatible with twenty-first century society. Even those Christian views that stand in contrast to widely-held contemporary views or ethics are well-considered and backed by theology, albeit with particular lenses: this nuance could perhaps be better expressed in essays. Candidates would also do well to draw out the range of views within Christianity more at times. There were also misunderstandings about the stances taken by *Mulieris Dignitatem* and Ephesians 5, both of which might require an understanding of lenses and nuance. It might also be useful for candidates not to assume that all secular views are progressive, inclusive and beyond criticism.

Successful responses focused on the question and drew from a range of sources. They also focused on the word 'roles' in the question, rather than talking about gender identity. Discussions about priesthood, different models of family and parenthood, homosexual relationships and the home were often very good. Some explored Jesus' attitude to the role of women and/or the early Church. Some candidates explored whether or not Christians must simply allow opposing views to co-exist or whether, for the good of society, they should challenge (appropriately) things that they might perceive will cause society to collapse. In exploring this, many successful responses examined elements of society that Christianity could learn from, while remaining focused on the question itself.

Question 4*

4* Critically assess Marx's teaching on alienation and exploitation.

[40]

As this question was a 'critically assess' question, it allowed candidates to examine teachings on alienation and exploitation either within the context of liberation theology or separately to it (or both). An excellent range of approaches was seen.

Misconception



No part of the specification is lesser than another and so the absence of Christian thought from the question should not have been a surprise.

As with other questions on the paper, candidates who did not focus specifically on alienation and exploitation (and instead expect the reader to infer understanding of these concepts) were less successful than those who selected material from their body of knowledge in order to answer the specific question.

Higher level responses developed an analysis of social sin and the preferential option for the poor to discuss whether liberation theology's adoption of Marxist teaching has shown it to be a helpful teaching. Others looked at challenges to capitalism in order to achieve the same end. Excellent responses also generally unpacked the notion of exploitation and alienation coming through the nonland-owning workers' roles on the production line and the further lack of creative input in the process and subsequent dehumanisation.

Many candidates included examples from their business ethics studies such as the Rana Plaza tragedy or possible exploitation of workers in contemporary multi-national corporations and where these were identified as modern, compared to Marx, they were used well. Some also showed an awareness of why liberation theology emerged in Latin America and why people there felt that they were alienated and exploited – and then what some Christians felt needed to happen as a result. There were also very contemporary flavours in some essays, such as the cost of living crisis, public sector strikes and current government scandals. More specific reference to Marx's own examples might have been helpful in places.

Analysis took on a range of approaches but the most successful explored the notion that Marxism could be argued to place alienation and exploitation into quite a small box with only one real solution and the complexities of life demand a different approach. Arguments in support of Marx's teaching often used a good understanding of historical materialism to illustrate the approach.

Exemplar 3

		<p> Marx also teaches that a major cause of alienation and exploitation is capitalism. He states that the fact that only few have access to the means of production mean that it leaves them open to exploiting exploit exploiting workers and the proletariat proletariat and treating them as 'an appendage of the machine'. He argues that capitalism continues the exploitation when the worker buys their wages to purchase from shops which further exploits them as the bourgeoisie continue to benefit due to their having private ownership, causing leading to alienation and exploitation. Marx's teaching on capitalism as a cause for alienation and exploitation can be highly contrasted to Christian theologians. Marx </p>
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was criticised of philosophers as
 he viewed them as people who
 merely only thought about the
 world when "the point is to
 change it". As a result of
 Marx's feeling it has led to
 liberation theologians notion of
 'Structural sin'. This is the sin of
 the economic systems of society
 which ~~leads~~ cause for people to
 be alienated and dehumanise
 each other. This shows how
 Marx's feeling on Capitalism as
 a source of alienation and
 exploitation has led to sin no
 longer being treated as an
 abstract notion and rather
 something comparable with what
 today's modern Christian theology
 more immerses ~~involved~~ involved
 with the problems of societal
 structures.

Exemplar 3 is an extract from an essay that just got into Level 6. This paragraph shows how Marx is being unpacked beyond what was typically seen. As with all essays, the final mark came out of the whole essay, not just one paragraph.

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