

**AS LEVEL**

Examiners' report

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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**H173**

For first teaching in 2016

**H173/03 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

Entries this year seemed to tend towards high-level responses that answered the questions well. However, in more cases than in previous years, it seems that the AO1 was weaker than AO2. Individual comments on questions, below, will explore what this looked like. Success in essays for this paper comes from being able to apply relevant knowledge and understanding to the arguments being discussed.

The paper was structured with three questions with a statement, followed by 'discuss' and this enabled candidates to approach complex questions from a number of different angles, within the time available. It might have beneficial for some candidates to consider how best to unpack the question before beginning their responses.

Question 1 was the most popular question but the full range of responses was seen across all three questions. Candidates seemed to be able to finish the paper in time on the whole. Success in this paper, as always, also comes from candidates being able to understand these topics through the practising Christian worldview.

### Answer the question!

However obvious it seems, it is important to emphasise that not only do candidates have to offer a broad discussion of the question, but they must also select relevant AO1. In order to do this they must understand what the question is asking.

### Assessment for learning



It is worth candidates considering how they will identify the AO1 they need to include in an essay at the essay plan stage.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• answered the question set</li> <li>• had engaged with the Christian approach to these topics</li> <li>• engaged in detail with the points being offered in each paragraph</li> <li>• covered key AO1 in their essays.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• did not fully understand the questions or the topics behind the questions</li> <li>• wrote short essays which did not engage fully with the material</li> <li>• did not show off what they knew about the Bible, purgatory, or Augustine's teachings on Original Sin.</li> </ul>

## Question 1\*

1\* 'Christian moral principles **must** be based on the Bible.' Discuss.

[30]

In unpacking the question, some candidates saw the phrase 'based on the Bible' and explored this successfully in every paragraph. Less successful responses gave pre-prepared material, usually one paragraph on each of the three bullet points from the specification. Excellent, nuanced responses recognised that agape is based on Biblical principles and a combination of sources of morality also come out of the Bible in different ways. Therefore, successful approaches to this question generally considered in some way whether Christian morality should be based on the Bible as opposed to rejecting the Bible's relevance.

Some candidates showed solid AO1 knowledge and understanding of the topic by demonstrating how the Bible is relevant for Christians as a form of revelation or by discussing divergence within Christianity in terms of interpretation of the Bible. Few candidates simply narrated Bible stories, and while many candidates showed good AO1 in terms of understanding different sources of morality for Christians, some completed their essays without specifically engaging with the Bible.

### Misconception



A common misconception is that Jesus' ethical stance is unrelated to the Bible. A surprising number of candidates did not appreciate that the Bible is our source for understanding Jesus' views.

## Exemplar 1

The heteronomous principle is able to counter some of these arguments, by suggesting that the scriptures should be used in conjunction with the church, which alleviates problems such as the Bible's ~~inability~~ inability to be used well on <sup>modern</sup> issues, which was a criticism that ~~could~~ <sup>would</sup> have been levied by Boef. However, this <sup>principle</sup> also brings its fair share of criticisms. It can be argued that, since the Bible is the word of God, it should not be diluted by the church, since, while they follow the teachings of Christ, they are not God himself, so they should not have the authority to change things like this. On the other hand, a historian would point out that the Bible was already diluted by the Romans, meaning that this

would matter less, as the scriptures are not God's word in their pure form anyway but simply our best surviving recording of it. Moreover, another argument against the heteronomous principle is that it is too flexible, since it is not just the Bible which can be used to make moral decisions, leading to a loss in the universalisability of its application.

Exemplar 1 shows a section of a response that did choose to look at the three groupings of sources of morality from the specification but used an excellent paragraph structure and a good understanding of the question to keep focused on what the question was asking. It achieved Level 5 in AO1 and AO2.

### Question 2\*

2\* 'The Christian idea of purgatory makes much more sense than hell.' Discuss.

[30]

This question had the most inaccuracies in AO1: the Christian idea of purgatory being often confused. The Christian idea of purgatory is most commonly associated with Catholic Christians and their view is that purgatory is a place where those who will go to heaven are prepared for that state of eternity with God. Catholics do point towards Biblical evidence for purgatory, both from books in the Bible shared with all Christians and from the apocrypha. Other models of purgatory do exist and many candidates had studied that of Hick, which allows for overlap with other parts of this paper and Paper 1. However, Hick's view differs from that of the Catholic Church.

Another frequent, if less common, mistake was to explore hell as a place that is not needed if purgatory exists. This might be true in Hick's model but for Catholics, for example, it is still possible to choose to reject God until the end and to go to hell. At AO2, these subtleties led to a range of outcomes because some candidates approached the question as 'either/or' – that is, either hell exists or purgatory does.

AO2 was generally stronger, with standard arguments exploring the nature of God and the point of Jesus' sacrifice. This is a good example of a question where a holistic understanding of Christianity helps candidates to succeed..

### Exemplar 2

		Purgatory is the idea of a place
		which you go after you have died
		this is neither heaven or hell, some
		people describe it as the waiting
		room of the afterlife. It is mainly the
		Catholic Church who believe in this,
		when you are in purgatory it is
		believed that you 'work your sins'
		away. At first this may seem quite
		a nice concept as it means that
		everybody, if they are willing to do the
		work for it can be able to go to
		heaven. However, it also means
		absolutely anyone is able to go to
		heaven. Many argue that this could



		mean everyone could be an awful
		person whilst they are on earth
		because they are still able to go to
		heaven once they work these sins
		away. An example which is commonly
		used is Hitler, would he be able to
		go to heaven after a certain amount
		of years and if yes why should
		anybody be a good person?

Exemplar 2 is an example of a Level 3 essay where some understanding of purgatory is present but required tighter knowledge and understanding for greater success.

### Question 3\*

3\* 'We have only to look at human societies to see that Augustine's teaching on Original Sin was correct.' Discuss. [30]

This was generally the most successfully answered question. Candidates were able to apply their understanding of Augustine's views about the effects of the Fall to some insightful discussions about modern society or human nature. Where candidates were less effective, they found themselves trying to discuss different approaches to understanding human nature (if, indeed, there is one) without returning to the question.

Success also came from approaches that took time to explore the effects of Original Sin in some detail, rather than simply dismissing it as creating disharmony or breaking a relationship. The impact on human nature was discussed in good detail and questions surrounding the transmission of Original Sin was also discussed. Candidates often went on to explore whether or not Jesus' sacrifice (or God's grace in general) is impactful enough to say that Augustine is less of a pessimist than some suggest and therefore that there is hope for human society.

### Assessment for learning



Candidates should practise writing essays (especially timed essays) from a range of types of questions and that are not simply discussion points directly from the specification.



## Exemplar 3

In today's society (and) we can see aspects of Augustine's teachings coming true in a literal sense. Many humans are alcoholics, drug addicts and corrupt people who would harm others in pursuit of money. This exemplifies how we suffer from "akrasia" or "weakened will" - humanity can no longer resist bodily cravings, and the balance of "caritas" and "cupidity" meaning (and) unconditional love and materialistic lower pleasure love respectively, has been forced out of balance by Adam. In this way, Augustine's teachings on human nature seem to be evidenced by our own society, but many more positivist philosophers such as & Steven Pinker would argue that we can use the Humanistic Principle to look at humanity in a more positive light, and help see how in many respects humans can improve and change their lives. Augustine's teachings seem to argue that there is no point to trying to do morally, since humanity is doomed to be punished by God eventually, but most Catholics and Protestants would agree that that seems to be against God's will. Theories like Natural Law seem to instead imply God gave us the intrinsic sense to be moral so

we can grow in His Image. So many Christians in our modern society would also suggest a majority of people do not believe in Augustine's Theology. Augustine's teachings were later critiqued by Hans Kung, saying that God led us and Adam "fell" so that we could be redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus as a show of God's grace. This theory makes Augustine's teachings seem more realistic at first, since it provides a more optimistic viewpoint which sounds more like the typical Christian God, but ultimately reduces our free will even further. If our only way of cleansing our original sin is through God's actions, and not our own, then it seems pointless to try to live a moral life anyway, and most of the population, religious or not, would agree against that naturally.

Exemplar 3 is an example of a candidate who engaged in depth with the material in a typical fashion. There is a clear focus on the question and the material selected is aligned carefully to the argument that is represented in this paragraph. As this was typical of the whole response, the essay achieved Level 5 for both AO1 and AO2.

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