

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/01 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 1 series overview

J625/01 examines the Beliefs and Teachings and Practices section of the GCSE Specification for Christianity. Candidates were required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of those beliefs, teachings and practices (AO1) in all parts of each question and to show their ability to analyse and evaluate aspects of belief, teachings and practices (AO2) in part (e) of each question. Candidates are also required to demonstrate knowledge of sources of wisdom and authority which underpin the beliefs, teaching and practices as well as to demonstrate knowledge of divergent views within Christianity in part (d) and about the issue raised in the evaluative section in part (e) of each question.

While the 2023 exam paper contained some quite specific questions which required factual responses, as always, examiners applied the principle of positive awarding wherever possible and used the levels of response to give marks to any appropriate responses for parts (d) and (e). Some of those responses did not feature in the mark scheme, which is an indicative document rather than a proscriptive one.

This paper proved accessible, eliciting a wide range of responses. Outstanding knowledge and understanding of Christian beliefs and teachings and practices were exhibited by some candidates and well developed evaluative and analytical skills were also clearly evident. The majority of candidates seemed familiar with the rubric expectations of part (e) mentioned above, employed sources of wisdom and authority and referred to common and divergent views within Christianity. A broad view of the meaning of sources of wisdom and authority was taken by examiners, to include scripture, tradition, statements of churches, lives and examples and teachings of key figures in the religion and significant events in the history of the religion. Biblical references were not required but were frequently given.

The structured format of the exam paper seemed to help candidates to focus their responses and limit the amount they wrote for the 3 mark parts of the questions, (a) – (c). Question 1 (a) for example, required only three words or short phrases. Responses to Question 2 (a) could be three place names. Even so, a handful of candidates did offer more than was required for these questions which could have affected their time management negatively.

Despite the answer booklet containing extra answer sheets, some candidates who needed more space than the booklet provided for parts (d) and (e) continued their responses on unlined sections of the paper and even around the sides of their response. This is obviously not helpful for the scanning process which is required to load the responses on to the marking system or for the examiners who will always do their best to read whatever the candidate provides.

Part (d) of both questions proved challenging for many candidates. These parts only assess knowledge and understanding, so responses which offered analysis or evaluation did not meet the criteria of the level of response and could not gain marks. The word 'how' in Question 1 (d) was used to indicate knowledge and understanding were required. Some responses suggested this had been misread as 'why'.

In part (e), evaluation and analysis (AO2) accounts for 12 of the 15 marks. There were examples of well thought out and structured discussions, referring to the views of more than one Christian group. The best responses were underpinned with sound knowledge and understanding, which marks were given for separately and many of those responses referred accurately to some kind of appropriate source(s) of wisdom or authority and recognised divergent views. Some responses offered a personal viewpoint which is no longer a requirement of the evaluative question and can inhibit the flow of the response. For the top two levels, responses need to demonstrate some judgement on the arguments, which may be evident as comments made throughout the discussion, and a balanced conclusion at the end.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offered sound knowledge of beliefs and teachings • write clear and concise responses to parts (a) – (c) of each question • identified common and divergent views and practices within Christianity • demonstrated the ability to weigh arguments supported by sources of wisdom and authority • demonstrated the ability to discuss an issue within Christianity, demonstrating the ability to make judgements about the views and offer a balanced conclusion to the discussion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lacked secure and detailed knowledge of beliefs and teachings • offered muddled or confused responses to part (a) – (c) • for Question 1 (d), responses were directed to a different question than the one asked • tended to offer vague references to beliefs and practices • omitted references to sources of wisdom and in the (e) parts • did not refer to divergent views within Christianity • presented limited knowledge of views without comment or evaluation and offered no appropriate conclusion to the discussion.

Question 1 (a)

1 (a) Give **three** ways in which Christians might worship during a church service.

- 1
- 2
- 3

[3]

Exemplar 1

- 1 Liturgical worship.
- 2 Non-Liturgical worship.
- 3 Charismatic worship.

[3]

As the first question on the paper, this proved an excellent starter for most candidates. The word 'ways' in the question enabled examiners to give marks for a broad range of responses including reference to types of worship; Liturgical, Non-Liturgical and Charismatic, as well as examples of worship such as prayer, singing and the sermon. Some responses were too similar for all 3 marks to be given. For example, prayer and private prayer. Most candidates realised that this was an opportunity to gain 3 quick marks. Some, however, did include details of the worship which was not required.

Exemplar 1 is a good example of a concise response.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Outline what some Christians believe about purgatory.

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[3]

Accurate knowledge of beliefs about purgatory were evident in some responses but many were confused or gave an account of popular misconceptions about purgatory. For example, it was often described as between heaven and hell or as a place of judgement and even hell itself. The best responses identified purgatory as a Roman Catholic belief and as a destination for the soul after death where cleansing can take place, eventually allowing the soul to enter heaven and the presence of God.

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe what Christians mean when they say that God is eternal.

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[3]

This question proved accessible and most responses could be given 1 or 2 marks. A tendency to repeat the same words or ideas meant that the third mark proved more elusive. In some responses other aspects of the nature of God were offered, for example omnipresence, which were not relevant to the question.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Describe how some Christian groups welcome a child into the church.

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..... [6]

This question was designed to allow candidates to write about the range of ways in which a child could be welcomed into the church. Many responses however, focused on baptism alone or baptism and confirmation with explanations as to why these are important. This restricted the marks which could be given to those responses as they did not address AO1 sufficiently to go beyond Level 1 or Level 2, 3 marks. Very few responses referred to dedication services as an alternative to baptism. Some concentrated on the issue of adult versus infant baptism which was not required. The word **how** in the question was intended to direct responses towards knowledge and understanding (AO1) so analysis and evaluation (A02) of the topic area were not relevant. Responses which did offer other ways in which a child can be welcomed into the church referred for example, to church creche, pram services, Sunday school, messy church, youth clubs and Bible studies.


Question 1 (e)

(e) 'A loving God would **not** allow evil and suffering to exist.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Christianity.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

The statement proved accessible and elicited some outstanding responses. This topic overlaps with Paper 6 but full marks were given to responses which did not take a purely philosophical approach to the issue in the stimulus. Some responses however did not focus on the thrust of the statement and rehearsed arguments for and against the problem of evil and its relevance to belief in God. Many responses exhibited excellent use of sources of wisdom and authority. As mentioned in the general remarks, up to 3 marks were given for knowledge and understanding. The other 12 marks were given for analysis and evaluation, so responses which offered accurate knowledge of views without any comment, judgement or conclusion could not be judged as satisfactory (Level 3) for AO2. They might of course have achieved full marks for AO1.

Question 2 (a)

2 (a) State **three** places of Christian pilgrimage.

1

.....

2

.....

3

.....

[3]

A large proportion of responses offered two or three different places of pilgrimage. Common examples included Jerusalem, Walsingham and Lourdes. Responses which referred for example, to Israel and also to Jerusalem or Rome and the Vatican could not be given 2 marks.

Responses listing more than the required number of answers

If the question asks for **three** responses, only three will be marked and in the order they are written. For example, if four responses are offered of which three are correct but the third response in the list is incorrect, only 2 marks can be given as the fourth response has to be ignored. The format of the response space on the exam paper is designed to guide candidates to provide three responses only.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Describe what is meant by the term evangelism.

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..... [3]

Exemplar 2

evangelism is spreading the faith and the word of God so more people can get to know him. Jesus told his disciples to baptise all the nations, meaning to convert them to Christianity. Evangelism today can be done by missionary work, preaching or doing good deeds. [3]

The word 'evangelism' was occasionally misunderstood or possibly misread as 'Ecumenism'. Many responses gave good description of the meaning along with a reference to the Great Commission and an example of a form of evangelism. The work of street pastors in supporting people without preaching was acknowledged as a form of evangelism, as was street preaching or missionary work.

Exemplar 2 is a good example of a response which offers three clear points and the third point demonstrates exemplification.

Responding to 3 mark questions with the command words Outline or Describe

Candidates need to make sure their responses offer three points or a statement with development and further development or exemplification to achieve the three marks.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Outline the Christian concept of the Trinity.

.....

 [3]

A very high proportion of response succeeded in outlining the concept of the Trinity and could be given at least 2 of the 3 marks. Some responses were rather convoluted but more frequently the concept was clearly explained. A fair number of responses included the observation that Unitarians do not believe in the Trinity which did not contribute to the explanation.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Outline different Christian views on the creation narratives in Genesis.

.....

 [6]

A wide range of achievement was noted for this question. Some responses were just an account of the narratives achieving few if any marks while others strayed into a discussion about the historical accuracy of the narrative of the Fall, which was not made relevant to the question and could not be judged to have matched Level 2 or 3. Other responses noted the difference between the narratives within Genesis and were distracted from considering different views about the narratives as a whole. Responses which focused on literal, metaphorical or mythological interpretations of the narratives fared best.

Question 2 (e)

(e)* 'Observing Lent is just as important as celebrating the resurrection on Easter Sunday.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Christianity.
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

Responses to the stimulus were extremely varied. Some showed misunderstanding or a lack of knowledge of Lent and/or the Resurrection. Some responses unfortunately confused Lent with Advent and Christmas. A significant number of responses did not give any indication of what the Resurrection was or its significance for Christians as a validation of Jesus as Son of God and of life after death. Often the meaning of the Resurrection was confused with explanation of the significance of the crucifixion, sacrifice and atonement. There were some excellent discussions however, which evaluated the benefits of self-denial, and the opportunity afforded by Lent for Christians to reflect on their faith, as opposed to the joy expressed in Easter Sunday services as Christians celebrate Jesus' resurrection and his victory over death.

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