

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/03 Summer 2024 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 responses 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

This year, candidates addressed the balance between AO1 and AO2 well with well-structured essays that analysed and evaluated the points being made, showing that a debate or discussion about a complex subject is not one-dimensional or does not finish after a statement of a different point of view.

The paper had three different command phrases which were handled well by candidates. Essay plans were not often seen and sometimes this might have helped with misunderstandings about the question or help candidates to remain focused on answering the question set within the time available. Candidates were able to finish the paper in time.

There were some concerns noted by examiners that some candidates tried to include all material on a given topic, rather than the specific material required by the question. Misunderstandings about which topic Question 1 related to, for example, might have been overcome by careful planning.

Plan the essay

There are huge benefits to planning an essay by establishing what the key points 'for' and 'against' a statement (or similar) might be. Then candidates can identify which key AO1 points will illustrate these arguments.

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 questions set showed good paragraph structure did not try to do 'too much' in their responses showed good assessment technique. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> misunderstood key AO1 incorrectly identified which topic questions were tested did not show a clear line of argument through an essay.

Question 1*

1* To what extent is a full and perfect knowledge of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ?

[30]

Those who grasped the full extent of the question were able to show how knowledge of God can be revealed in the person of Jesus. They were able to draw on numerous actions, teaching and doctrinal beliefs associated with Jesus and in doing so were able to show how this reveals something of God.

Candidates were also quick to compare revealed theology with natural theology, often successfully but sometimes reducing their writing to a generic essay on the relative merits of each.

The greatest issue seen, and found in a significant number of responses, was that some answered the question by trying to discuss what Jesus knew about God or that Jesus shows us what God knows, presenting material from the topic on Jesus, rather than the topic on knowledge of God. Sometimes essays tried to discuss the extent to which Jesus was divine, covering in one paragraph each Jesus as wisdom teacher, Jesus as liberator and Jesus as Son of God, without focusing on the question. For example, to say that Jesus was a miracle worker candidates would need to identify the miracles showing God's power and compassion for all, in order to address the question. Many candidates, however, used the material to make the point that Jesus is God but not explicitly to react to the question.

Exemplar 1

		The full and perfect knowledge of God
		can be revealed in the person of
		Jesus Christ through him being
		seen as a teacher of wisdom. This
		means that Jesus was spreading
		God's word through stories - parables -
		so that we'd be able to understand
		them. This shows Jesus revealing
		the knowledge of God because he'd
		use God's word and put them into

		<p> stories so that we could understand them in a simple way. For example, the Bible articulates how Jesus quotes "Eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth but don't resist an evil person. If someone slaps you on the right turn the other cheek to them." This suggests through Jesus' teachings he is telling us that if one of our neighbours hurts us we shouldn't aim to hurt them, we should leave them. This can compare to God because God commands us to love thy neighbour. This means Jesus takes God's words and expands his words so that we can fully understand the concept of loving your neighbour. </p>
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Exemplar 1 illustrates some of the misconception stated in the commentary.

Misconception



There is a difference between the topics on Jesus' knowledge of God and humanity's ability to know God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

Question 2*

2* 'The universalist belief that all people will be saved is **not** supported by Christian teaching.'
Discuss.

[30]

Candidates who achieved the highest marks were clearly able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the universalist belief and argued convincingly that this is, or is not, supported by Christian teaching. The Sheep and the Goats was often discussed, being a set text, but there was plenty of illustration from the Bible and other Christian teaching.

Contrast was made with other aspects of salvation theology especially limited and unlimited election. Augustine and Barth were both used frequently, although sometimes too much of the essay then went on to discuss the impact of the Fall.

Some candidates used universalism as a peg around which to write the essay without finding space to unpack what it was or its implications. A careful plan at the start of the essay might have avoided this. Indeed, essays that took different aspects of universalism in turn and discussed whether or not they are reflected in Christian teaching were often very successful.

Discussion about Hick and purgatory sometimes showed misunderstandings because the two were grouped together as if there is only one understanding of a time of cleansing after death. Catholics were sometimes mislabelled as holding to universalism because of their belief in purgatory.

Exemplar 2

2		<p>The universalist belief is that all of humanity will be saved by God's grace through salvation. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in which we receive salvation. In this essay I will argue that universalism pioneered by John Hick the is not supported by christian teaching.</p> <p>Universalism was ^{proposed} suggested by John Hick who proposed suggested that everyone after death, will receive universal salvation thus meaning, everyone will be saved from their sins. This idea of universal salvation aligns with the traditional characteristics of the christian God who is omni-benevolent, suggesting that, because he is all loving he will allow everyone a second opportunity to atone for their sins and thus, everyone will go to Heaven and have eternal life.</p> <p>However, a major issue raised by many scholars is for example, Richard Dawkins suggests that this idea of universal salvation raises the question of whether God is just. that for example, if a person on earth commit commits a vile crime like murder or rape in their lifetime, according to Hick they</p>
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		to can enter the kingdom of Heaven
		alongside the innocent victim, or those
		how is this just? and many others
		If when they die because of the
		concept of universal salvation-
		everyone is saved- but how is this
		fair or just?

Exemplar 2 is an example of the start of a high-level response to this question.

Assessment for learning



When analysing a theory, it might benefit some candidates to come up with strengths and weaknesses of each stage of that theory, rather than as a whole at the end.

Question 3*

3* Critically discuss Bonhoeffer's teaching on Christian ethics as 'costly grace'.

[30]

Some candidates wrote exclusively on Bonhoeffer himself, giving a bibliographical overview of his life and works, rather than focusing specifically on his teachings on Christian ethics and 'costly grace'.

A number of candidates were unable to clearly articulate Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'costly grace'. Some were keen to compare Bonhoeffer's understanding of 'costly grace' with Augustine's teaching on grace, thus detracting from the question set. The main misunderstanding seen was the idea that, for Bonhoeffer, grace is in some way transactional – that humans can gain salvation only through suffering. Grace is still a gift in Bonhoeffer's view but Christian ethics demands a life of good discipleship, which will be 'costly' in some way.

The best responses showed an understanding of Bonhoeffer's presentation of the Christian life and the change it must bring in a person and evaluated it using his context, relevant Christian teachings and sometimes modern issues. These responses tended to use Bonhoeffer's teaching on solidarity, ethics as action and civil disobedience as examples of 'costly grace'. This distinguished their responses from those of candidates who described Bonhoeffer's actions (most often civil disobedience) rather than engaged with his teaching on 'costly grace' and how they link with other elements of his theology.

Exemplar 3

		Jesus. This type of sacrifice can be seen, in
		what Bonhoeffer identifies as 'costly grace'.
		This type of grace is received when we
		sacrifice something, to follow Christ and God,
		which Bonhoeffer distinguishes from cheap
		grace, which is when you say or believe
		what is needed without doing what is needed.
		Bonhoeffer argues that costly grace is more
		important. This is convincing because we need
		to make sacrifices in order to achieve greater
		opportunities, and overcome hardships in our
		daily lives.

Exemplar 3 shows a common presentation of 'costly grace' that might have been more successfully expressed.

Misconception



'Costly grace' is not about a transaction; it is not saying, 'If you suffer, then you will be saved'. Rather, it is an expression of the mark of a Christian disciple; 'If you are a Christian, then you will be prepared to give your all in response to God's gift'.

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