

Examiners' report

AS LEVEL

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**OCR Level 3 Advanced Subsidiary GCE in
Religious Studies**

H173

For first teaching in 2016

H173/03 Summer 2025 series

Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 3 series overview	4
Question 1*	5
Question 2*	6
Question 3*	8

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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

Would you prefer a Word version?

Did you know that you can save this PDF as a Word file using Acrobat Professional?

Simply click on **File > Export to** and select **Microsoft Word**

(If you have opened this PDF in your browser you will need to save it first. Simply right click anywhere on the page and select **Save as . . .** to save the PDF. Then open the PDF in Acrobat Professional.)

If you do not have access to Acrobat Professional there are a number of **free** applications available that will also convert PDF to Word (search for PDF to Word converter).

Paper 3 series overview

This year, candidates engaged well with the questions set. Candidates were able to complete two full essays and were able to finish the paper in time. Two of the questions had a statement followed by the command word 'discuss', for which candidates were able to comment critically on the focus of the question. The final question asked candidates to consider to what extent reason has more authority than the Bible for Christian ethics which, again, candidates were able to access with a good balance of AO1 and AO2 content. Essay plans were not often seen, and planning may have helped candidates to focus on the specific area of the specification directed by the question, rather than the whole topic.

There were some concerns noted by examiners that some candidates tried to bring in too much material from the H173/01 paper for Question 1, which in some cases led to candidates losing focus on the question.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- selected material relevant to the question set - demonstrated a good balance of AO1 and AO2 - tied the line of argument back to the question throughout the response - used the introduction to outline their line of argument.	- did not show a clear line of argument through an essay - used material from across the general topic area - did not spend sufficient time explaining the AO1 content directed by the question.

Question 1*

1* 'God may be known through the natural order of creation.' Discuss.

[30]

This was the least popular question on the paper but was generally answered well by candidates. They demonstrated clear engagement with the theme of natural theology, particularly through reference to the extent to which the nature of God can be known through reason and observation. These responses often used some content from the teleological and cosmological arguments, drawing on thinkers such as Aquinas and Paley, as well as Calvin, evaluating their effectiveness in revealing God through the natural world and/or having an innate sense of God. High-level responses also considered the counterarguments from scholars such as Augustine, Hume and Dawkins, showing critical analysis and balance. Many candidates integrated the concept of 'revealed theology' to contrast natural knowledge of God, through the order of creation, with knowledge through faith and scripture, emphasising the role of revelation and faith.

Some less successful responses saw candidates spend too long outlining the teleological and cosmological arguments, either offering only descriptive accounts or drifting into general discussions about the existence of God without anchoring their arguments in the natural order of creation. Some candidates focused too heavily on religious experience or miracles, which, while relevant to the general topic, detracted from the specific focus on the order of creation.

Exemplar 1

		However, it is argued that through observation of the natural order of creation we must come to the conclusion of some type of an
		intelligent designer. William Paley argues a reasonable conclusion in his watch analogy. He states that if we were to find a pocket watch in the middle of hay stack we would logically realise that by observing the intricate workings of the machine that it didn't merely appear there by chance, but rather there must be a designer, an engineer behind its making. When observing the natural

This exemplar demonstrates a candidate using Paley and the teleological argument to support the line of argument without spending too much time describing Paley's argument in detail which could distract from the focus of the answer.

Question 2*

2* 'Jesus' mission was primarily to be a teacher of wisdom.' Discuss.

[30]

This was a popular question, with most candidates selecting it. There was a danger, however, that candidates argued persuasively that Jesus' mission was NOT primarily to be a teacher of wisdom and, as a result, that they offered very little AO1 and AO2 focus on Jesus as a teacher of wisdom.

More successful responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the term 'teacher of wisdom', drawing on Jesus' use of parables, sayings and moral teachings, particularly from the Sermon on the Mount. These candidates showed clear knowledge and understanding of Jesus' role as a teacher of wisdom, including interpretations of passages such as the Sermon on the Mount, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, the Prodigal Son, and the Good Samaritan, and explored how Jesus' teachings reflect Jewish wisdom traditions. High-level answers also critically assessed whether this role was Jesus' **primary** mission, contrasting it with other aspects of Jesus' mission, such as 'liberator' and 'Son of God'. Reference to key scholars and the work of C. S. Lewis, Bultmann, Aslan, Rahner and Dawkins were common. The most successful responses offered a balanced evaluation, considering whether Jesus' wisdom teaching was his primary mission or perhaps whether his role as a teacher of wisdom was a means to a greater salvific purpose.

Less successful responses often did not engage with the word 'primarily', instead offering general descriptions of Jesus' teachings without evaluating their centrality to his mission. Some students focused too heavily on miracles demonstrating Jesus' divine nature, or Jesus' death and resurrection, without linking these to the theme of wisdom, preferring to emphasise Jesus as Son of God. Others conflated wisdom with general morality, missing the theological depth of Jesus' teachings seeing him solely as a political liberator.

Exemplar 2

		While Jesus clearly taught wisdom through
		parables and moral instruction, this was
		not his primary mission. Jesus' core purpose
		was to bring about salvation through
		his death and resurrection, not merely
		to be a moral or philosophical teacher.
		This essay argues that (1) Jesus' role
		as messiah and saviour is central to
		the New Testament narrative and
		early Christian belief and (2) his
		wisdom teaching served his salvific
		mission; but was not the ultimate goal.
		This position is supported by scholars
		such as St Paul.

Here we can see that in the introduction to the essay the candidate has laid out their argument clearly, that while Jesus was a wisdom teacher, this was not his primary role. In this way, they have explained how their discussion of other aspects of Jesus' mission will be made relevant to the question.

Assessment for learning



Candidates can use the introduction to outline the line of argument they will make in their essay, focusing explicitly on the question. This can give a helpful road map as to what material they are going to select to support their discussion and give the examiner a clear sense of the argument they are going to make.

Question 3*

3* To what extent does reason have more authority than the Bible for Christian ethics?

[30]

More successful responses demonstrated a clear understanding of Christian ethics, engaging directly with the question's focus on the use of reason and the Bible as a source of authority for ethical guidance within Christian ethics. High-level answers explored how different Christian traditions – such as Catholic Natural Law, Protestant sola scriptura, and liberal approaches – balance reason and the Bible. These responses critically assessed whether reason, as a God-given faculty, can override or complement Biblical authority, drawing on thinkers such as Aquinas, Newman and Fletcher. The most successful essays maintained a sharp focus on Christian ethics, avoiding general ethical theory unless explicitly linked to Christian contexts.

Less successful responses seemed to use a prepared essay on heteronomous, theonomous and autonomous ethics, without directly relating these to the question set. Others did not engage with the phrase 'Christian ethics', drifting into general discussions of reason versus faith or secular moral reasoning. Some candidates focused too heavily on philosophical arguments unrelated to Christian moral frameworks, such as Kantian ethics or Utilitarianism, without linking them back to Christian thought. Others relied too heavily on the authority of the Magisterium or treated the Bible as a historical text rather than a theological authority, missing the nuance of its ethical role within Christian traditions. Less successful responses saw candidates focus almost exclusively on thinkers such as Bonhoeffer, showing reason as having more authority than the Bible. More successful responses mentioned Bonhoeffer as an example and applied this knowledge well to the focus of the question.

Key point call out

Candidates should avoid using pre-prepared essays which cover the general topic area rather than the specific question. For Questions 2 and 3, some candidates responded with a general discussion of the person of Jesus (Question 2) and a general discussion of different approaches to Christian Moral Reasoning (Question 3), rather than focusing explicitly on the question set.

Exemplar 3

3.		A theonomous approach to the Christian ethics would regard the Bible as the sole source of ethics, and and an autonomous approach to Christian ethics would be using reason to apply the key principle of selfless, sacrificial and spontaneous love, agape. This essay will seek to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of both approaches but will ultimately decide that a autonomous approach has more authority than a theonomous approach.
----	--	--

This introduction is an example of a candidate not responding directly to the question set. It appears that they are presenting an answer on the general topic, covering heteronomous, theonomous and autonomous ethics, rather than selecting relevant material to the question set, which asks for a focus on the use of the Bible and reason.

Supporting you

Teach Cambridge

Make sure you visit our secure website [Teach Cambridge](#) to find the full range of resources and support for the subjects you teach. This includes secure materials such as set assignments and exemplars, online and on-demand training.

Don't have access? If your school or college teaches any OCR qualifications, please contact your exams officer. You can [forward them this link](#) to help get you started.

Reviews of marking

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our post-results services. For full information about the options available visit the [OCR website](#).

Access to Scripts

We've made it easier for Exams Officers to download copies of your candidates' completed papers or 'scripts'. Your centre can use these scripts to decide whether to request a review of marking and to support teaching and learning.

Our free, on-demand service, Access to Scripts is available via our single sign-on service, My Cambridge. Step-by-step instructions are on our [website](#).

Keep up-to-date

We send a monthly bulletin to tell you about important updates. You can also sign up for your subject specific updates. If you haven't already, [sign up here](#).

OCR Professional Development

Attend one of our popular professional development courses to hear directly from a senior assessor or drop in to a Q&A session. Most of our courses are delivered live via an online platform, so you can attend from any location.

Please find details for all our courses for your subject on **Teach Cambridge**. You'll also find links to our online courses on NEA marking and support.

Signed up for ExamBuilder?

ExamBuilder is the exam paper builder platform for a range of our qualifications. [Find out more](#).

Free for all OCR centres with an Interchange account, it allows unlimited users per centre. We require an [Interchange](#) username to verify your centre's users for ExamBuilder.

If you do not have an Interchange account, please contact your centre administrator (usually the Exams Officer) to request a username.

Once you have an Interchange username, use the form on [this page](#) to sign up for ExamBuilder, or ask an existing user at your centre to create an ExamBuilder account for you.

Active Results

Review students' exam performance with our free online results analysis tool. It is available for all GCSEs, AS and A Levels and Cambridge Nationals (examined units only).

[Find out more](#).

Tell us what you think

Your feedback plays an important role in how we develop, market, support and resource qualifications now and into the future. We want you and your students to enjoy and get the best out of our qualifications and resources, but to do that we need your honest opinions to tell us whether we're on the right track or not.

You can email your thoughts to resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk or visit our [feedback page](#) to learn more about how you can help us improve our resources.



Designing and testing in [collaboration with you](#) and your students



Helping young people develop an [ethical view of the world](#)



Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) are [part of everything we do](#)

Contact the team at:

☎ 01223 553998

🖥 ocr.org.uk

To stay up to date with all the relevant news about our qualifications, register for email updates at ocr.org.uk/updates

Visit our Online Support Centre at support.ocr.org.uk



OCR is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

OCR is a Company Limited by Guarantee and an exempt charity. Registered in England. Registered office: The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA. Registered company number: 3484466.

We operate academic and vocational qualifications regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA as listed in their qualifications registers.

We are committed to providing a fully accessible experience across all our products, platforms, and websites. Find out more about our [accessibility standards](#).

© OCR 2025. All rights reserved. We retain the copyright on all our publications. However, our registered centres are permitted to copy and distribute our material for their own internal use, in line with any specific restrictions detailed in the publication. Find out more about our [copyright policies](#).

We update our publications regularly so please check you have the most up-to-date version.

We cannot be held responsible for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and do not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

When we update our specifications, you'll see a new version number and a summary of the changes. While we do our best to reflect these changes in all associated resources on [Teach Cambridge](#), if you notice any discrepancies, please refer to the latest specification on our website and [let us know](#).

Our resources do not represent any teaching method we expect you to use. We cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions in our resources.