



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (8RS0)
Paper 4B: Christianity

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8RS0 4B AS Christianity

Introduction

This is the third year for the examination of Christianity as part of the new GCE AS Religious Studies specification (8RS0) and centres now appear to have become comfortable with the specification and candidates are clearly more familiar with what is expected from them. The general understanding of this paper is improving year on year. The candidates who did well demonstrated a personal engagement with the concepts and were also able to develop their responses well. However, there were some candidates who, although they demonstrated knowledge, did not fully articulate this in order to show understanding.

Once again, this year exam technique has improved noticeably with fewer candidates failing to attempt some of the questions. However, time management is still an issue and a sizeable number of candidates clearly ran out of time on the final question Q04(b) and thus lost the opportunity to gain marks.

The examination is 1 hour long. There are 54 marks available across two sections. Section A consists of three extended, open-response questions with a total of 26 marks available and Section B has one two-part essay question with part (b) providing an opportunity for an extended response that enables candidates to offer sustained analysis and evaluation.

The content is focused on an in-depth study of Christianity in terms of 'Religious beliefs, values and teachings', 'Sources of wisdom and authority', and 'Practices that shape and express religious identity'.

The questions on the paper this year were:

Q01: Explore key ideas of Christian belief in God as personal.

Q02: Assess the strength of the modern view that God suffers through Jesus.

Q03: Assess the importance of the role of prayer for Christians.

Q04(a): Explore the notion of 'relation' for understanding the Trinity.

Q04(b): Analyse the significance of modern views on the Trinity for Christianity today.

Better responses were able to establish relevance and this in turn enabled examiners to identify why a particular point had been made. Good candidates clearly reflected on issues, rather than merely learning them, thus providing thoughtful insights. In doing so, they were able to offer effective arguments. Successful candidates were consistent throughout the paper in demonstrating sound knowledge and understanding such as:

Q01: Responses at this level were focused on the demands of the question. Buber's I-You relationship between two active subjects/persons approach featured heavily along with the relationship aspect of God being personal. Some good answers were able to explore the relevant attributes and characteristics of God that are reflected in a personal way such as love, father etc and these were explained well.

Q02: As expected, Moltmann featured in most of the good responses with candidates offering knowledge and understanding of Moltmann's argument that the suffering of God is the direct consequence of God's decision and willingness to suffer. Very good answers also offered a contrast with Weinandy's argument that a God who is impassible is more loving and compassionate than a suffering God. Barth and Hick featured effectively as part of some of the more evaluative responses.

Q03: This question was generally answered well by the majority of candidates with a range of knowledge and understanding clearly evident in the role and use of prayer. A range of relevant material was offered such as prayer being a central part of Christian life and faith; that prayer encompasses both privately and publicly the act of speaking/communicating with God; and different types of prayer such as petition, praise and intercession.

Q04(a): Good responses at this level recognised the intent of the question and explored the concept of the relationship between the components of the Trinity including characteristics of each, along with some good identification of the 'substance' and 'persons' aspects and that these distinctions reflected the characteristic roles of each Person of the Trinity and how they co-exist together.

Q04(b): Barth and Rahner's approaches were explored effectively at this level as was the influence of Moltmann, Hick and other scholars. Better responses set the modern understanding of the Trinity in its context in terms of emerging from the Early Church deliberations and even those of the reformation era.

Weaker candidates failed to develop their answers beyond mere description. A significant number of responses for questions Q02, Q03 and Q04(b) read simply as unconnected lists of facts learned, without any demonstration of why the points mentioned might be relevant. Poorly focused responses merely outlined ideas, with a few generalised assertions in the final paragraph. There were also issues of faulty and imprecise understanding, especially in questions Q02 and Q04(a) and (b). Some candidates handicapped themselves by very poor use of English often offering muddled expressions.

Q01: Some candidates' answers at this level tended to offer some basic material on communication along the lines of 'prayer' is the way God is personal. Similarly, the presence of the Holy Spirit was identified as being personal. God being personal was seen in creation by some but not developed effectively.

Q02: Poor answers only offered a basic acknowledgement of the crucifixion as God suffering. It should be noted that this question was the least popular one and that some candidates did not even attempt the question.

Q03: Weaker candidates only offered a basic and simplistic knowledge about prayer with no meaningful development or ability to evaluate or apply the knowledge.

Q04(a): Weaker responses here at this level tended to offer a description of the shamrock and/or the 3 aspects of water (ice, steam and liquid) as analogies for the Holy Spirit with no concept of the relationship between the three elements/persons of the Holy Spirit.

Q04(b): Some failed to grasp the intent of the question and few offered any relevant material on modern views. Some gave a minimum understanding of some Early Church approaches to the formulation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Others gave a more general description of the Holy Spirit. Answers here tended to be very brief and probably guess work at times!

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Take time and care to consider the precise demands of the question by engaging with the relevant trigger words such as '**assess**' and '**analyse**'
- Make use of scholars to support the argument being made and not aimlessly dropped into the answer
- Candidates should try and come to a judgement or take a position in the conclusion
- Candidates need to ensure effective time management so they do not run out of time before completing Q04(b) and consequently the potential to earn 20 marks
- Select relevant examples to support the points being made.