

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/03 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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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. 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 can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 3 series overview

The A Level Developments in Christian Thought paper acts as an introduction for candidates to a range of different types of theology over the course of their two years' study. To do well on this paper, candidates need to engage with the topics and analyse material critically – thus, immediately, the need for AO2-driven essays becomes clear: students who focused on AO1 did not do as well as those who had experienced the theology for themselves in class and who could show this journey in their writing.

All four questions were accessible by candidates and successful essays tended to show:

- a clear line of argument – mentioned at the start and followed through
- paragraphs starting with engagement with the question (not topic)
- economical use of AO1 to aid the AO2, including 'enough' mention of academic approaches, rather than over-peppering with scholars' names, views or quotations.

Interestingly, candidates scoring into Level 6 for all three essays sometimes were clearly able to do so without using additional pages of their answer booklet.

Key point call out

Answering the actual question set, directly and specifically really is the key to success!

The most common plea from markers of this paper is that candidates have a better grasp of the big picture of themes in core Christian history: salvation history through the Bible, redemption and the work of Christ, that the Church did not exist as a *fait accompli* after Jesus rose from the dead and so on. Core terms (Old/New Testament, theologian, Protestant etc.) should be able to be used effortlessly.

Question 1

1* 'Humans have an innate knowledge of God.' Discuss.

[40]

Answers to this question ranged from scriptural approaches to an analysis of the main ideas of how we can know God, if at all. There was a good discussion of the natural versus revealed theology debate and the nuances within this. Calvin featured most frequently, unsurprisingly, often contrasted by secular views but equally contrasted by other areas from this part of the specification. Less frequently was seen a discussion of Acts 17 which, despite not being a set text, might be a useful one to consider as it can be used in other areas of the specification.

Discussion about conscience, intuitionism and God as the standard of goodness was usually kept within the boundaries of the question; the teleological argument, when mentioned, was more often given too much weight and the response could become a philosophy answer.

Some candidates clearly did not understand the word 'innate', which was unfortunate, as discussions about the general natural versus revealed theology debate without homing in on the question could well struggle to leave Level 2 (general topic AO1 and asserted points for AO2). Candidates need to be careful when selecting pre-Christian thinkers and applying them to Christianity questions: clearly, handled carefully in an essay such as this, it can be a skilful addition to an argument, but it can also go wrong when a candidate uses them as one scholar among many.

Exemplar 1

One ~~es~~ of the most commonly shared beliefs ~~is that~~ is this topic of ~~it~~ is that we have an innate knowledge of God, a "God shaped hole". This argument is supported

Another argument ~~is~~ used to support this idea is people religious experiences, ~~and more importantly~~ Many people of all faiths, have reported that they have had a physical, spiritual or emotional religious experience. One example of

One growing argument against the idea that we have an innate knowledge of God is ~~the~~ ^{our} ~~develops~~ scientific developments.

The exemplar for this question illustrates a response that is typical of those that receive Level 3 or occasionally 4. The opening section of each paragraph is duplicated to show how important it is to tie responses back to the question and to run this technique through the essay rather than to present information almost in isolation. [Exemplar 1]

Question 2

2* Discuss the view that the idea of purgatory makes more sense than hell.

[40]

There was some excellent use of Biblical passages to explore this question, most notably the Sheep and the Goats and the Rich Man and Lazarus. Key discussion naturally ranged around God's benevolence, the Bible's lack of reference to purgatory (with some excellent awareness of the nature of the Apocrypha), and the question about whether purgatory negates Christ's sacrifice.

Scholarly views, where used (although not specifically required for full marks) included Dante (when used well, Dante is shown as typifying a view from the Middle Ages of the metaphysical, rather than being a statement of Church teachings), Hick, Hume as well as secular views in moderation.

A core criticism of candidates' work would have to be the lack of understanding of the contemporary Catholic view on purgatory. While many understood that purgatory – or at least a third state in the afterlife – has seen different models, and many understood that Hick's universalist model is very attractive in the twenty-first century for either the right or wrong reasons, depending on the theological stance taken, basic misunderstandings about purgatory in Catholicism were rife. It is not a waiting room, nor a place before judgement, nor a place of 'trying again'.

Occasionally, in an attempt to explain purgatory in great detail, candidates forgot (on the AO1-side) to explore what hell actually is but equally, there were some very detailed and relevant responses. Where candidates chose to explore the aspect of the specification that explores whether states in the afterlife are symbolic or actual places, many were able to do so with skill in their selection and focus on the question.

Exemplar 2

The view that purgatory makes more sense than hell suggests an unmerciful God who doesn't want to condemn his people to a lifetime of suffering in hell. It creates the opportunity for humans to repent for their sins and continue their process of development as humans. Some may say purgatory is unnecessary due to the creation of an elect, however this is too restrictive and demanding on God's nature, showing the opportunity for redemption in purgatory as more convincing.

The exemplar takes the opportunity to show a simple, yet effective introduction that, if followed through, could easily lead to a high mark.

Question 3

3* 'Inter-faith dialogue strengthens Christian communities.' Discuss.

[40]

This question elicited a large range of approaches and the full range of marks was seen. The two set texts from the specification were clearly well-known and have often been explored in good detail by candidates who showed their ability to apply their understanding to the question. The phrase 'Christian communities' was perhaps glossed over by some candidates and, although examiners interpreted this in the broadest possible sense, there was sometimes some question about whether candidates were answering the question set or just a general one about whether inter-faith dialogue is a good thing. There were some excellent uses of examples, sometimes those from the appendix in 'Sharing the Gospel of Salvation', although these examples can be summarised in a sentence and have the same impact as a precious half page of an essay.

Some candidates took the question as requiring an exploration of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism – *if* inter-faith dialogue were practised by each of these, would it strengthen a Christian community or not? This was an entirely valid approach, although sometimes quite cumbersome.

Many candidates argued that the key benefits of inter-faith dialogue are social: community cohesion and mutual understanding leading to a peaceful community. By carefully imagining what might make up a Christian community, it could be possible for candidates to imagine what might strengthen that community – for example, members of a Church participating in Scriptural Reasoning or reporting back and praying about encounters at the checkout. Discussion about the threat that inter-faith dialogue might present to a religion that requires belief in the Incarnate Christ was usually well-done.

Exemplar 3

One reason to suggest inter faith dialogue is beneficial for Christian societies is that it gives an opportunity for Christians to learn new ideas and meanings. An example of this may be that by allowing Christians to share their knowledge and teachings with Hindus or Buddhists, they're likely to gain a new perspective on their own outlooks whilst being able to educate others on ~~theirs~~ theirs. This is beneficial because it promotes peace between religions and forms a stable and diverse multi cultural society whilst being respectful to others views. This suggests that inter-faith dialogue does strengthen Christian communities because it helps establish a peaceful link between faiths and communities whilst also learning the richness and wisdom of other faiths.

On the other hand, some may disagree and argue that inter-faith dialogue is wrong and only weakens the Christian teachings. For example, an exclusivist, someone who believes Christianity is the only true religion, would argue there is no truth in other faiths and only those committed to God and Jesus ~~and salvation~~ will reach salvation. Inter faith dialogue is problematic because it suggests that Christianity isn't the true religion and may cause Christian ~~students~~ ^{parents} to worry their children will be led astray. This suggests inter faith dialogue isn't beneficial for Christian societies and only weakens it by creating inter faith conflicts in society.

The exemplar shows a paragraph from a good essay that as a whole lacked the tightness for full marks but edged into Level 6, demonstrating the importance of quality of argument more than sophisticated language or quantities of scholars. The candidate has selected a point to discuss within the paragraph (inter-faith dialogue is beneficial because it allows Christians to learn) and then there is clear AO1 highlighted, followed by an internal discussion of the point and a clear return to the question at the end.

Question 4

4* 'For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is head of the church.' (Ephesians 5:23)

Critically assess this teaching for 21st century family life.

[40]

Most candidates naturally approached this text by setting the quotation against society's values as we observe them (in the Christian West). As essays developed, there was a good appreciation shown of the impact in the twenty-first century of recent feminists, most notably those on the specification. Sometimes candidates spent too much time explaining one or both of Ruether and Daly. Of course, it was entirely possible to write at length about this question from the perspective of just the 'gender and society' material from the specification.

The answers that stood out were those that observed some of the nuances of the Biblical text without writing it off immediately as sexist and outdated. Two key points emerged from careful exegesis by candidates in preparation for the exam (rather than in the exam itself): a consideration of the challenge on men being arguably as challenging as that on women (Christ loved the Church to sacrificial death) and also a discussion on the nature of headship (interpretations of *kephalos* as 'source of life'). However, many candidates joined feminist thinking in assessing these as patriarchal attempts to excuse the Biblical tradition. Some candidates usefully observed that Galatians 3:28 was written by the same author as Ephesians.

There were noticeably fewer responses that 'ranted' about feminism or the place of women to last year; where emotions took over, it was often in rather a narrow view of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which is perhaps not quite as negative towards women (or society) as candidates suggested. Some candidates missed the focus on 'family life' and spent too long writing about women in general.

Exemplar 4

However, Simon Chan argues that it is wrong to reinterpret the Bible and ignore certain teachings as the patriarchal influences shape the identity of Christianity as a whole. It is true that the patriarchal messages such as those found in Ephesians are interwoven throughout the Bible and ignoring them could water down significant messages. ~~On the other hand,~~ However, I do not find this view convincing as I do believe that the Christian message can still be retained upon egalitarian reinterpretation.

The stated Ephesians quote can be interpreted in a way which promotes equality of gender roles in 21st century ~~of~~ family life. For example the word 'head' in Greek is translated to 'kephale' which is associated to the word 'source'. Just as Christ is the source of Christianity and the church, the husband is the source of life for the women. The ~~of~~ teaching could be referencing the importance of relationship ~~with~~ in the process of reproduction and this is significant in society. It is important to note that religious teachings have the potential to be lost in translation as the Bible was not written in English which is why it should not be interpreted literally.

The exemplar is a useful paragraph from a Level 6 essay. The paragraph is full of clear analysis that is driving the essay forwards to an answer to the question. Typical of Level 6 essays is the feeling that the reader is 'swept along' by the writing.

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