

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

H573

For first teaching in 2016

H573/03 Summer 2022 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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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Paper 3 series overview

While Question 4 was the least commonly answered question, all four questions were popular and elicited the full range of responses. The quality of written communication was noticeably weaker than in previous sessions both in terms of grammatical inaccuracy (e.g. the construction of the past tense of verbs, such as 'wroted', rather than 'wrote') and in terms of the quality of handwriting.

Contrary to the experience of previous sessions, however, there seemed to be fewer candidates who only answered two questions or whose third essay was noticeably shorter and/or less successful.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaged directly with the question set and answered it • formed an argument that ran through essays • used a well-rehearsed essay structure that had become 'automatic' by the time of the exam • showed engagement with the subject over the duration of their studies, rather than the listing of scholars' names. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • missed nuance through ignoring specifics in a question • wrote over-long introductions that listed scholars rather than getting into the discussion of the essay • possibly wrote responses to pre-prepared questions.

Question 1*

1* 'True knowledge of God is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.' Discuss.

[40]

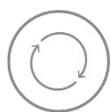
Key terms were used in most responses and they exhibited knowledge of aspects of the debate about whether natural theology is needed in addition to revealed theology. However, this was not quite the focus of the question and where candidates limited themselves to what seemed to be pre-prepared essays, they found it difficult to access the highest levels. The best responses focused on Jesus throughout and evaluated the points raised as they progressed. For example, they explored the special nature of the incarnation as a point of contact or the idea that source evidence about Jesus comes only from the Bible, which presents its own set of difficulties.

Candidates were usually able to distinguish between philosophy and theology when deploying material that overlaps with Unit 1 and while many candidates explored what it means to know God (i.e. by focusing on discussing different types of knowledge), they used this exploration to develop responses to the question, e.g. can an intellectual experience of Jesus in the Gospels lead to a loving relationship with the transcendent creator of the universe?

Where candidates explored more broad issues, there was some tendency to overuse scholars (or popular figures and celebrities who have commented on issues). Indeed, where scholarly views are used, it is often more sophisticated to present the view as a whole, coming from a body of scholars, than present the words of one individual as the final word in a matter. Sometimes, these broad issues led to a divergence from the question, e.g. too long spent on debates about the effect of the Fall on human ability to know God.

These broad issues often demonstrated the 'starting point' for candidates approaching this essay. Where candidates started with: 'which is better: natural or revealed?', they were less likely to home in on the question. A better approach was to start with: 'can we get true knowledge of God through the person of Jesus?' The former approach also led to candidates stating that Aquinas and Calvin would say that Jesus did not reveal knowledge of God as it seems to start with the misapprehension that natural and revealed theology are mutually exclusive.

Assessment for learning



Candidates need to be aware that a whole essay can be set on sub-topics – such as in this question where a whole essay is set on revelation through Jesus Christ, rather than revelation as a whole.

Question 2*

2* Assess the view that Rosemary Radford Ruether's theology offers a satisfactory solution to the issue of God and sexism in Christian thought. [40]

Responses to this question suggested candidates either misunderstood it or misread the wording. Many candidates set out the intention in the introduction to compare Daly and Ruether (which was not the question) while others rejected Ruether in the introduction and wrote several pages on Daly. Those candidates who focused on Ruether, however, produced some excellent, nuanced responses that demonstrated an understanding of Ruether as being more than just about reform for structural reasons but examined her theological approach.

Successful responses understood Ruether's desire to reject from within. By understanding, for example, the influence of Sophia/Chockmah as the feminine principle lost by language, tradition and patriarchy, she sought to reverse the results of thousands of years of women being on the underside of history. There is a subtlety to Ruether's approach that some candidates perhaps missed in their rejection of her views as 'not going far enough'.

It was not necessary to bring in a comparison to Daly (or other scholars from beyond the specification) but many excellent responses did so effectively. When choosing to make this sort of comparison, the better responses did not seek to cover all the material on Daly but selected elements from her thought that enhanced their line of argument at that stage of the essay.

Candidates did not always understand the deep spirituality that sat underneath Daly's thought and opinions, imagining her as a champion for women for practical reasons and focusing on stories of her refusing male access to her classes, for example, rather than her emphasis on the spirituality of women. It is important to approach this topic as a topic within Christianity in order to be able to answer questions such as this one in examinations.

Exemplar 1

2		<p>Assess the view that Rosemary Radford Ruether's theology offers a satisfactory solution to the issue of God and sexism:</p> <p>Ruether was a catholic, feminist, liberation theologian. Like other feminist theologians, like Daly, she recognised how christianity is a primary source of women's abuse and thus it must be spiritually reformed. Other than that, Ruether and Daly drastically differed in their responses. Ruether presents a strong and logical argument which entails much thought, whilst Daly's is based off hate, ference and sexism too. Thus Ruether presents the better argument of the 2. However, she does unintentionally compare God with her interpretation of Sophia and so it is not wholly satisfactory.</p>
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This extract is chosen because it is an illustration of the way in which many candidates transformed the Ruether question into one on Daly. It also illustrates the sweeping judgements seen about many scholarly views in this question and beyond: academic doubt is an excellent tool, especially at this level. In this particular case, the candidate went on to be successful in their response and get a high Level 5 for both AO1 and AO2 and so this illustrates the importance of the introduction sitting as a brief but integral part of the essay – i.e. setting out a line of argument before going on to make the same argument in detail.

Assessment for learning



Candidates need to understand the internal strengths and weaknesses of topics in the specification so that they do not need to rely on the comparison with another view or scholar, in order to demonstrate their ability to evaluate them in an essay.

Misconception



Many candidates stated in some form that there are no valuable arguments against the ordination of women. Even those Christians in favour of the ordination of women understand, but reject, the theological basis of other views.

Question 3*

3* 'Jesus was only a teacher of wisdom.' Discuss.

[40]

While the question did invite candidates to answer with reference to the three categorisations of Jesus found on the specification, the focus for successful responses needed to be on whether Jesus could be said only to be a teacher. Some candidates tried to answer this by discussing whether Jesus was divine: this is absolutely appropriate material but needs to be drawn into the context of Jesus as a teacher. Those candidates who did focus on the three sections of the specification needed to be clear that these sub-divisions of who Jesus is, or was, is arbitrary in the context of the specification and that many other possible descriptions of Jesus exist.

Candidates should be mindful not simply to repeat bullet points from the specification; for example, a number of references to Jesus' teaching on inner purity and moral motivation were seen with no exemplification as to whether Jesus' wisdom teaching in these areas was significant. Equally, it is important that candidates move away from narrating parables or sections of the Sermon on the Mount: these can just as effectively be referred to by name or brief quotation to make a point that contributes to an overall argument.

Where passages were addressed (either those listed as set texts or otherwise), many candidates did not show much awareness of the subtleties of Biblical scholarship. Passages were sometimes said to have one definitive meaning and were often assumed to be verbatim accounts of Jesus' life. A number of candidates attributed the parting of the Red Sea to Jesus or said that he was the victim of the mugging in the Good Samaritan. A significant number referred to Jesus' reincarnation. Candidates should perhaps be mindful of the appropriate background knowledge required for this unit.

An interesting approach taken by some was to explore the nature of a Wisdom teacher at the time of Jesus and the extent to which this fits Jesus as a core descriptor. Most rejected this on the basis of the evidence of Jesus the miracle-worker (and not just magician) or of the 'I am' sayings in the Fourth Gospel (qualified by appropriate understanding of the Gospel).

Question 4*

4* Evaluate Bonhoeffer's views on a Christian's duty to the State.

[40]

Candidates found this an accessible question but where responses were weaker, this tended to be through not demonstrating depth in their responses, perhaps attempting to cover all points on Bonhoeffer in detail, rather than focusing on what Bonhoeffer's views were about a Christian's duty to the State. Other less successful responses were more historical than theological and ended up exploring whether or not a Christian should have had a duty to the Nazi State, rather than exploring a Christian's relationship with State, government or institutions.

More successful responses were able to use specific Bonhoeffer terminology to develop their answer. For example: to understand grace as being costly, candidates might have explored the implications when the Christian comes into conflict with the promulgations of authority: because, for Bonhoeffer, grace is costly, not cheap, the Christian must accept the need to act in difficult ways. To understand acting in the moment, fuelled by appropriate spiritual preparation and exercise, candidates might mention Finkenwalde in passing, but focus on what to do when faced with something the State suggests with which they do not agree.

The most successful responses usually included a consideration of the extent to which Bonhoeffer can be dismissed as a crisis theologian and moved beyond the idea that Bonhoeffer's Christian ideal seems quite dull to a twenty-first century British teenager. There were some insightful applications of Bonhoeffer's methodology to contemporary global situations such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the war in Ukraine, exploring the Christian responses to these situations as well as what Bonhoeffer or his adherents might have done.

Exemplar 2

		Bonhoeffer's views on a Christian's duty to the State is less important to duty to God as we should possess costly grace. For example, we should use this free, God-given grace to sacrifice our lives to God as he comes before the State. This is because we have a call to remain which is a call to be obedient and follow follow his teachings. We can know God with us in the moment of action which can help us align our will with God's which is more important than the State.
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		Bonhoeffer believes we should follow Jesus' commandments Christianity where we get rid of the many swords and old teachings of Christianity and new Nazi ideologies and create a new radical form of Christianity. This goes against the state as the German state didn't allow Jews due to Jewish law at the time which Bonhoeffer disagreed with.
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This exemplar is chosen to illustrate common issues when writing about Bonhoeffer. Costly grace is stated as something that can be possessed. It is possible that the candidate does understand what it is but it is unclear. The mention of obedience to Jesus is important but glossed over. Knowing God's will is also skimmed over. Too much is covered in one paragraph.


Exemplar 3

		<p> ⁴ Bonhoeffer's view that our duty to God is paramount has some practical issues, however. The state has laws that are easy to follow, but the will of God can only be discerned 'in the moment of action'. He says we must be ready to be 'interrupted by God' in our decision making. However, our interpretation of God's will could be misguided, irrational, flawed, or prone to confirmation bias. We could use 'the will of God' to justify anything incorrectly, even extreme violence or terrorism against the state. This seems dangerous to enforce as a principle. </p> <p> Bonhoeffer claimed that we could hold each other accountable for our interpretations of God's will by being in a spiritual community, where we ^{people could} </p>
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4	5	<p>help dispell essentric or extreme interpretations, such as with the religious community he established at Finkenwalde. However, we do not often make moral decisions collaboratively in modern day life within a religious community. This means individual interpretations of God's will could be dangerous. Perhaps duty to the state is useful in enforcing certain laws and rights, as Bonhoeffer's view that 'the will of God is Christian Ethics' could lead to dangerous actin in the name of God's will.</p>
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This exemplar is chosen as a contrast to Exemplar 2 to demonstrate how careful use of material can contribute to a full mark essay. The candidate covers a wide range of knowledge about Bonhoeffer, just like the previous candidate, but does so with nuance and skill and each sentence contributes to the candidate's overall argument, which was that Bonhoeffer's approach cannot be used for moral decision-making outside of his context.

Misconception

 Some candidates misunderstand some of Bonhoeffer's terminology. Costly grace is not a type of grace to be chosen over cheap grace; rusty swords is not specific to war-time Christianity and religionless Christianity is not simply a desire to move away from institutional religion.

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