

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

J625

For first teaching in 2016

J625/01 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.

Assessment structure change

Following feedback from teachers and examiners, we are replacing the 6-mark combined assessment objective questions in GCSE Religious Studies J625. These changes will make our assessment more straightforward for students, teachers and examiners. We have also made a minor change to a level of response descriptor in the mark scheme. These changes will be introduced for the 2020 exam series.

What has changed?

- For Components 01–05 (Beliefs and teachings and Practices) the 6-mark question which was previously assessed using a combination of AO1 and AO2, is being replaced by a 6-mark question which will be assessed using **AO1 only**.
- For Components 06–10 (the religion, philosophy and ethics papers) there are two 6-mark questions. One will continue to be assessed using AO1, and the other which previously used a combination of AO1 and AO2, will now be assessed using **AO2 only**.
- In our levels of response descriptors we have changed 'adequate but underdeveloped' to 'satisfactory'.
- We **haven't** changed 15 mark questions which are assessed using a combination of AO1 and AO2, or made any changes to the specification content.

How are we supporting you?

We have updated the sample assessment materials to reflect these changes for 'Christianity Beliefs and teachings and Practices', 'Religion, philosophy and ethics in the modern world from a Christian perspective', so you can see what our new question papers and mark schemes will look like. These can be found under the assessment tab on the GCSE Religious Studies qualification pages. We will update the sample assessment materials for the remaining components ready for teaching in September 2019.

In September we are hosting a webinar which will add further clarification to this update, and answer any questions which this might raise. Look out for more information on how to book your space on this in the next few weeks.

In September we will also provide a candidate exemplar resource, which will provide more details about these changes to help your students become familiar with the knowledge and skills needed in our qualification.

If you would like further information please contact the Religious Studies Subject Advisor on 01223 553998 or email religious.studies@ocr.org.uk.

Paper 1 series overview

J625/01 examines the Beliefs, Teachings and Practices section of the GCSE Specification for Christianity. Candidates are required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of those beliefs, teachings and practices (AO1) in all parts of each question and to show that their ability to analyse in part d) and analyse and evaluate aspects of belief, teachings and practices (AO2) in part e). Candidates are also required to demonstrate knowledge of Sources of Wisdom and Authority which underpin the beliefs, teaching and practices as well as knowledge of divergent views within Christianity, about the issue raised in the evaluative section of each question (part e).

The nature of the specification requires some quite specific questions to be asked but as always, examiners applied the principle of positive awarding wherever possible and used the levels of response to give credit to any appropriate responses, many of which did not feature in the mark scheme, which is an indicative document rather than a prescriptive one.

This paper proved accessible, eliciting a wide range of responses. Outstanding knowledge and understanding of Christian beliefs and teachings and practices was exhibited by some candidates and well developed evaluative and analytical skills were also clearly evident. The majority of candidates seemed familiar with the rubric expectations of part e) mentioned above. A broad view is taken by examiners of the meaning of Sources of Wisdom and Authority to include scripture, tradition, statements of churches, lives and examples and teachings of key figures in the religion and significant events in the history of the religion. Some candidates offered very specific knowledge. However examiners reported that a significant number of candidates did not identify any source of wisdom and authority and thus limited their responses to Level 1, gaining only 1 mark for AO1 out of a possible 3 marks.

The structured format of the question paper seemed to help candidates to focus their responses and limit the amount they wrote for the 3 mark parts of the questions, a)-c). This was in pleasing contrast to last year where some candidates lost time expanding their responses to these parts unnecessarily. 1a) for example required only three words while 2a) only required three short statements. Despite the answer booklet containing additional answer sheets some candidates who needed more space than the booklet provides for parts d) and e) continued their responses on unlined sections of the paper and even around the sides of their response. This is obviously not helpful for the scanning process which is required to load the responses on to the marking system or for the examiners who will always do their best to read whatever the candidate provides. Even so, the potential for poor organisation and tiny and untidy handwriting to compromise the flow of the argument / response is significant.

Part d) of both questions proved challenging for many candidates. This part is assessed for both AO1 and AO2 but candidates needed only to concern themselves with responding to the question and giving as full and as thoroughly a developed a response as possible. Good responses to these parts offered sound knowledge and deep understanding (explanation) and some analysis of the topic of the question as well.

In part e), evaluation and analysis (AO2) accounts for 12 of the 15 marks. There were examples of well thought out and structured discussions, referring to the views of more than one Christian group. The best responses were underpinned with sound knowledge and understanding and referred accurately to some kind of appropriate source(s) of wisdom or authority. Some candidates offered a personal viewpoint which is no longer a requirement of the evaluative question and can inhibit the flow of the response. Good responses demonstrated some judgment on the arguments presented, based on evidence and made comments throughout the discussion, concluding with a balanced conclusion.

Question 1 (a)

1 (a) State three different types of prayer.

.....
.....
.....
.....
..... [3]

A very wide range of responses could be given. These included adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, grace, liturgical prayers, private prayers and many others.

Exemplar 1

Confession

Adoration

8a. Thanksgiving

This is a good example of a response offering three correct answers which are, listed without any additional material. No time was wasted by offering unnecessary explanation of the knowledge or additional information.

Question 1 (b)

(b) Outline **one** of Jesus' teachings, which Christians aim to apply in their lives.

.....

 [3]

Many responses referred to Jesus' teaching about love. A statement about love of one's neighbour or one's enemies was expanded with examples of how this might impact on the life of a Christian. Only one teaching was required and according to the instructions in the mark scheme any other teaching offered could not be given.

Exemplar 2

Jesus taught you should love your ~~enemies~~ ~~enemies~~ enemies. Christians aim to show love and care to every person and always treat everyone the same. Christians should not hate or take revenge on anybody.

This is an example of a very straightforward response which follows the order of a statement of one teaching, supported by some development and exemplification which enables the response to get full marks. It refers to Jesus teaching about loving enemies (1 mark), which is developed to show how it might apply to Christians (1 mark) and it is exemplified in the final statement about not taking revenge (1 mark).

Question 1 (c)

(c) Describe **one** Christian belief about the existence of evil in the world.

.....

 [3]

The majority of responses referred to the narrative of the fall to explain the existence of evil in the world. Others referred to Augustinian or Irenean theodicy. A few offered an explanation of the Inconsistent Triad but did not always make it sufficiently relevant to the issue of the existence of evil in the world. Responses tended to fall neatly into the form of a statement followed by development and explanation or exemplification. This is the best way to achieve the 3 marks available in a concise manner, reducing the potential for over long explanations, which can seriously undermine time management.

Question 1 (d)

(d) Explain why charismatic worship is important to some Christians.

.....

 [6]

In order to respond well to this question, candidates needed to give some account of the nature of charismatic worship and then address the matter of its importance to some Christians. Examiners reported that a significant number of candidates did not have an accurate understanding of charismatic worship making it difficult to salvage anything from their responses as regards its importance to some Christians. Candidates who did offer knowledge and understanding of charismatic worship referred to its active, participatory nature and to examples of how worshippers are led by the Holy Spirit to contribute spontaneously, to sing, pray, speak in tongues. The technical term glossolalia was often used and responses also mentioned being 'slain in the spirit'. The importance for some Christians was often described in terms of how this kind of worship is exciting, better for young people, enthusiastic, expressive and most importantly driven by the power of the Holy Spirit which takes over the worshipper. The power of God evident in this kind of worship was seen in many responses, as the reason why some Christians find this kind of worship important in contrast to formal liturgical worship.

Question 1 (e)

(e) 'Easter should be more important to Christians than Christmas.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Christianity
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

 Spelling, punctuation and grammar [3]

Knowledge and understanding of the significance of both Easter and Christmas tended to be sound and some cases exceptional, especially in reference to the significance of Easter for the salvation of humans through sacrifice of Jesus and the hope of life after death resulting from his resurrection. Examiners accepted that candidates would refer to the period around Easter rather than just Easter Sunday enabling them to credit references to the last supper, the institution of the Eucharist and the crucifixion. References to the ascension were given a small amount of credit if they were made relevant as part of the outcome of Jesus rising from the dead and exemplifying his power and significance as the risen Christ.

The requirement to support views with Sources of Wisdom and Authority was not well met by a significant number of candidates. Those who did show how the beliefs associated with Easter and Christmas were underpinned by Sources of Wisdom and Authority tended to refer to the Bible and to specific texts within it. For example John 3.16 in relation to Jesus as the sacrifice given by God or to the narrative of the annunciation to Mary and of the virgin birth to support the belief that God became man in Jesus Christ.

The stimulus suggested a diversity of views. Responses referred to the emphasis of some denominations on the message of Easter as opposed to that of Christmas. Many however discussed how the events of Easter depended on the events of Christmas and that it made no sense to suggest one to be more important than the other. Some responses focused as well on the community and festive aspects of Christmas and Easter contrasting the tendency for commercial and secular aspects of Christmas to become distractions from its real significance while Easter had kept more of the original religious focus.

Many candidates offered comment and discussion between arguments enabling them to reach Level 3 or 4 but some presented their response in the format which was appropriate to the evaluative response for the previous specification, giving a couple of views and a personal viewpoint. No personal view is required in this section of the exam but a balanced judgment is required in order to achieve the higher levels and some comment about the views offered enhances the response, enabling it to achieve the higher levels.

Question 2 (a)

2 (a) State three things which are said or done during a celebration of the Eucharist.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

[3]

Responses tended to be suitably brief offering statements about the distribution of bread, wine and the recitation of the word of Jesus at the Last supper. Some responses referred to more general activities such as prayers and the singing of hymns. Transubstantiation and consubstantiation were terms used by some candidates in reference to what Christians believe is taking place during the Eucharist. A few responses gave an account of the Eucharist service which required examiners to sift out the three things which are said or done. As with 1b) only the first three things offered by the candidate could be given.

Question 2 (b)

(b) Outline what Christians mean when they say that God is a Judge.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

[3]

Most responses referred to the beliefs that God is omniscient and just. So, for Christians, God is a judge who has all the information needed for a fair and just judgment of a person. Responses were often completed with reference to how the judgement is something that would happen after death or on the Day of Judgment.

Question 2 (c)

(c) Describe what the term Atonement means to Christians.

.....

 [3]

A definition of Atonement was accepted for one mark but for the other marks, responses had to focus on what the term means for Christians, which is the belief that the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross atoned or paid for the sins of mankind. A few responses referred to the Day of Atonement in Judaism while a significant number muddled it with reconciliation or confession and a view that Christians have to make up for or atone for their sins through penance and good works.

Question 2 (d)

(d) Explain why Christians have different attitudes towards baptism.

.....

 [6]

In order to respond effectively to the question candidates had to refer to different attitudes towards baptism and then explain why these exist showing some analytical skill in considering the reasons and significance of the attitudes. A very high proportion of responses referred to both infant and adult baptism and gave brief descriptions of each. Responses about the reasons for different attitudes often referred to the need for consent to become a follower of a religion which is possible in adult baptism in contrast to infant baptism. This was sometimes supported by reference to Jesus' baptism as an adult. The significance of infant baptism for Christians was less well understood although many responses did refer to the benefit for the child of being brought up in the faith and to grow up within the family of the church. Some did refer to the importance of infant baptism to cleanse the child of original sin enabling the child to enter heaven should they die before they could confirm the promises made on their behalf by the parents. Some responses referred to denominations which do not practice baptism at all. Explanations for this tended to be rather vague but appropriate credit was given.

Question 2 (e)

(e)* 'Christian beliefs about life after death are not important today.'

Discuss this statement. In your answer, you should:

- Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view, referring to common and divergent views within Christianity
- Refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

[15]

The topic in the stimulus was drawn from the section of the specification Eschatological beliefs and teachings and specifically the bullet point about Common and divergent beliefs about and interpretations of death, judgment, purgatory, heaven and hell. Candidates therefore had to consider this topic within the context of Christian belief rather than as a topic concerning the secularisation of society and the decline of religion within it. However the impact of these views on the development of Christian thought could be given but a paragraph offering a secular view on its own did not enhance the response or move it to a higher level. The focus was on how Christians view this issue not atheists or agnostics. Many responses referred to how life after death is still important to Christians as it is a key part of their beliefs. This was supported by reference to the account of the resurrection of Jesus in the Bible or to the words of the creeds which many Christians recite regularly in their worship. Responses often focused on how some Christians lived their lives in the hope of a better life to come and to avoid punishment suggested for example by the parable of the sheep, and the goats. This view was often balanced by the view of other Christians that what happens after death is much less important than how life is lived now. Christians should be living the example of Jesus and not worrying about whether this will get them to heaven. If it does, then that is a bonus but the imperative is to help others and put the teachings of Jesus about how to live into action. It was possible to give credit here for responses which suggest that longevity and the pressures of secularism had helped to form this view in contrast to the medieval insistence that a good life should be lived just to avoid eternal punishment and hell.

The comments about the style of response made with reference to 1e) are appropriate for this part of the question as well. The higher levels are given for a discussion offering comment on views and for a balanced conclusion.

Exemplar 3

In conclusion the belief about life after death is still important today because it is a very common belief amongst Christians now. It also gives hope and meaning to others knowing there is a chance of eternal life with God.

This is an example of a brief but appropriate conclusion to a discussion which was judged to be Level 2 in terms of the evaluation of viewpoints which were stated rather than developed. The conclusion lifted the response from AO2 Level 2, 6 marks to AO2 Level 3, 7 marks as it showed a measure of judgment on the issue and matched the fourth bullet point in the descriptor for AO2 Level 3. It is not a personal view but an attempt at a valid judgment, based on evidence drawn from the body of the response.

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