
GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES A

Paper 1 Christianity

Report on the Examination

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General comments

There are four key messages:

- Teachers and students have done very well in preparation and achievement for the first year of this new specification, and have laid the foundations for assessment in the coming years.
- The most significant change has been in the introduction of the 12-mark evaluation questions. These are a main discriminator for student performance. Some students are restricting their achievement by using structural formulae such as FARM (for, against, religion, my views). This tends to result in some students giving single for-and-against points, followed by a very general quotation (such as 'love thy neighbour'), and followed at the end by a summative evaluation statement. Given that Levels 3 and 4 in the mark scheme require 'logical chains of reasoning', this formula is not likely to encourage them. On the positive side, many students produced some superb evaluation and critical analysis.
- Some students wrote additional comments in seemingly random places in their answer booklets. In particular, additional material appeared in the space set aside for the 12-mark questions. Further, some students wrote comments on both religions on one set of additional pages. Answer booklets contain extra space at the end, and it is advised that students use this space to continue responses which go beyond the lines given underneath the questions and also signal to an examiner where this space has been used.
- There was some evidence that students limited their access to marks by not being sufficiently careful in reading the question. This was particularly true in Question 01.3, which refers to 'influences', a key word which was sometimes ignored (see below on Question 01.3). Further, in questions 01.4 and 02.4, some ignored the second command in each of these questions: 'Refer to sacred writings or another source of Christian belief and teaching in your answer.'

Christianity: Beliefs

Question 01.1

This was well known, with the vast majority of students selecting the correct answer.

Question 01.2

The most popular teachings given were that original sin means the first sin of Adam and Eve, and that they disobeyed God by eating fruit from the forbidden tree. Some began with a reference to the sin of Adam and Eve, and then said that their sin was redeemed by Jesus' atonement / crucifixion: a neat pairing of ideas. Weaker responses simply talked about 'sin' in general. Many responses gained full marks on this question.

Question 01.3

The strongest responses simply answered the question and referred to 'influences'. The most popular influences identified (among many) were that Jesus experienced great spiritual and physical suffering, and knowing this helps Christians who suffer today cope with their own pain;

and knowing the whole story of the crucifixion, including the reasons for it, means that Christians may be influenced to deeper commitment and worship. Weaker responses tended to make incidental comments about Jesus' crucifixion without referring to 'influences'. The key point here is to make sure that each question is read carefully.

Question 01.4

Weaker responses to this question were not clear about the meaning of 'incarnation', and a significant number read it as, or mistook it for, 'reincarnation'. The result was that there were lots of anecdotes about Hindu and Buddhist beliefs concerning life after death which were irrelevant. More successful responses said that Jesus was God made flesh / God in human form; Jesus was fully God and fully human; Jesus was God the Son and part of the Trinity. A similar set of comments was made concerning the appearance and message of the angel to Mary (Luke 1:26-38); also to Joseph (Matthew 1:20-21), rooting Jesus' birth as a human firmly in the context of the Gospels' birth narratives. Where possible, it is helpful for students to use material where the requirement to refer to sacred writings / a source of Christian belief and teaching is a clear part of the answer.

Question 01.5

Weaker responses tended to use (either by design or by default) the 'FARM' approach referred to in the second key message above. Where this was the case, the kind of argument given tended to say something like: God is all loving / A loving God would not send anybody to hell / But those who disobey God deserve to be punished, so they will go to hell / So I think that some people will go to hell. A better approach would be for responses to follow the rubric given in the four bullet points of the question itself: refer to Christian teaching; give reasoned arguments to support the statement; give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view; reach a justified conclusion. The key here is the word 'arguments' (in the plural) – students are invited to supply an ordered chain of reasoning which goes beyond single arguments and which helps them to reach a **justified** conclusion. A statement of what the student believes is not a justified conclusion.

The range of arguments given in stronger responses was large. For example, some concluded that the answer to this question was that it depends on what hell is. For some, it is the fiery pit / a place of eternal torment. For others it is separation from God, or a form of Purgatory which offers hope to the person being punished. The general conclusion was that as a just Judge, God might sentence some people to temporary separation and/or Purgatory, but not to eternal torment, since that would be malevolent rather than benevolent.

Christianity: Practices

Question 02.1

This was less well known than 01.1, with just over half of students correctly identifying C (Lighting the Paschal candle) as the correct answer.

Question 02.2

Just over four fifths of students obtained full marks on this question. Most referred to service in Mission, active evangelism, giving money to the Church, and inviting people to take part in church services. Students should avoid single word answers in questions requiring 'two ways', since these do not always clarify meaning (eg 'money' / 'help' / 'work').

Question 02.3

This was generally well answered, although a few responses referred to terms from Islam. Most contrasted liturgical with non-liturgical worship, which worked very well. Others referred to different practices in prayer, and this was equally effective. All other relevant examples were of course credited. Many responses achieved full marks on this question, and all of the examples given in the mark scheme were used.

Question 02.4

In some ways, this question generated the weakest responses seen on the paper. A significant number of students made no attempt to answer the question, and it was clear from other responses that some were unsure of the meaning of 'reconciliation'. Others defined the term 'reconciliation', but made no attempt to answer the question.

As with Question 01.4, the strongest responses to Question 02.4 illustrated two ways with reference to appropriate sacred writings or a source of Christian belief and teaching. Most referred to the Corrymeela Community, which aims to bring about reconciliation in Northern Ireland by healing religious and political divisions in the community. This was linked with the specific requirement for forgiveness at the heart of the Lord's Prayer. Many referred to the efforts of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who worked for reconciliation between the black and white communities in South Africa after decades of violence. This was linked particularly with the teaching in Galatians 3.28; 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus.'

Question 02.5

This question was generally not as well answered as 01.5. Many responses did not go beyond a simple contrast such as: 'Believer's baptism gives a choice; infant baptism does not,' or 'Jesus had a believer's baptism so we should follow his example'. In some cases this was a question of time management, where it appeared students had spent too long on other parts of the paper.

As with 01.5, stronger responses developed chains of reasoning with appropriate reference to religion, from all of which a justified conclusion was drawn. One of the most effective approaches was to make contrasting points based on religious data. For example:

- the contrast between infant baptism as a sacrament and believer's baptism as a practice which demonstrates faith (ordinance);
- infant baptism as removing the taint of original sin, and believer's baptism as a means of repenting past sins and starting a new life in the Church;
- believer's baptism as being based on a principle of rational choice, as opposed to the benefits of infant baptism postponing choice until confirmation aided by the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- believer's baptism as following in Jesus' footsteps, as opposed to Jesus' command to baptise all nations, which presumably included children and infants.

There were of course many other lines of argument, but contrasts and comparisons such as the above helped many responses to reach a justified evaluation based on the comparison of arguments.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.