



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 GCE

Religious Studies (8RS0 4B)

Advanced Subsidiary Level

PAPER 4B: Christianity

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8RSO_4B Non-ERA Report

The overall quality of responses indicates that both candidates and centres are generally well-prepared for the demands and objectives of the AS specification. Many candidates demonstrated a good understanding of the subject matter throughout the paper. Numerous responses show-cased a clear and comprehensive understanding of Christian beliefs, practices, and theology. Some of the best responses came from those who, while writing concisely, had clearly organised their thoughts, presenting their arguments in a structured and coherent manner from the outset.

It was particularly encouraging to see the accurate and effective use of technical vocabulary in many responses. References to scholars were, for the most part, thoughtfully chosen and contributed meaningfully to the development of answers. However, there were instances where candidates included scholarly references in a somewhat arbitrary manner, with little or no relevant contribution to their argument.

Q01 Explore the key features of Christian belief in God as creator (8)

Responses to this question were varied. Some candidates produced outstanding answers that demonstrated a strong command of technical vocabulary, terms such as *ex nihilo* (used with accuracy and understanding) and emanation were particularly well handled. Many of these stronger responses also incorporated relevant biblical references, especially from Genesis, to support their arguments. A few candidates engaged with artistic interpretations of creation, though this was rarely done with depth or effectiveness. At the other end of the spectrum, some responses were quite basic, focusing primarily on a literal retelling of the Genesis creation account and referencing the six or seven days of creation without further exploration. A significant number of candidates referred to the attributes of God, such as omnipotence and omniscience and used these to explain how God's nature enabled Him to create the world. Some responses also included ideas about human dominion, God's love for humanity, and humanity's love for God.

To improve, candidates needed to move beyond a simple recounting of the creation narrative. Stronger answers should engage more with theological concepts, use terminology with precision, and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the significance and implications of the creation accounts.

Q02 Assess the significance of the Arian heresy for Christianity (9)

It was evident that many candidates found this question particularly challenging. While several responses referenced the Council of Nicaea, these often revealed a limited or superficial understanding of its historical and theological significance. Arius and Athanasius were frequently mentioned, leading to overly detailed descriptions of the Arian controversy, however, the majority of candidates struggled to move beyond AO1 and into the evaluative demands of AO2. As a result, many responses lacked meaningful analysis of the significance

of the events discussed. That said, some candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the theological debate within the Early Church. Where the term consubstantial was used, it was typically applied accurately and effectively, indicating thoughtful engagement with the complexities of the topic.

Q03 Assess the Christian belief that the Bible is the word of God (9)

Responses to this question were notably mixed. Many candidates successfully engaged with the AO2 demands by evaluating two contrasting perspectives on the Bible as the word of God. One common argument presented was that the Bible is the literal word of God, written by divinely inspired individuals, prophets, apostles, those that had a personal relationship with God. In contrast, others argued that the Bible has undergone translation and interpretation over centuries, suggesting it should be understood metaphorically rather than taken at face value. However, a number of responses lacked depth and precision, relying heavily on general or superficial knowledge. Some candidates strayed from the focus of the question entirely, discussing scientific theories, such as evolution and Charles Darwin, in ways that misinterpreted the intended theological focus.

Some candidates produced excellent, scholarly responses. These demonstrated clear understanding of key thinkers such as St Augustine, Paul Tillich, and John Hick. These answers were well-informed, conceptually strong, and rich in technical vocabulary. It was particularly encouraging to see accurate use and explanation of more advanced concepts such as epistemic distance.

Q04a Explore the key features of the diversity of practice in the Eucharist (8)

Many candidates produced strong responses to this question, demonstrating a clear understanding of the differing beliefs surrounding the Eucharist. A significant number were able to accurately explain key theological terms such as transubstantiation, the belief that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ and consubstantiation, which holds that Christ is symbolically present alongside the physical elements. These terms were often used confidently and in the correct context. It was also encouraging to see frequent and appropriate references to the biblical origins of the Eucharist, particularly its inception at the Last Supper. However, some responses were limited to basic descriptions of the Eucharist, with little or no reference to the diversity that exists among Christian denominations. These answers tended to describe the ritual itself without exploring its varying interpretations or significance within different traditions.

Overall, this question was answered well. Most candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of the diversity of Eucharistic beliefs and practices across the Christian tradition. The stronger responses combined theological insight, accurate terminology, and contextual understanding, showing that this is a topic that has been well taught and well understood.

Q04b Analyse the significance of the Eucharist for believers (20)

Question 04b elicited a wide range of responses, with a mixed level of understanding evident among candidates. While many were able to engage meaningfully with the topic, others struggled to focus their answers specifically on the significance of the Eucharist for believers.

Stronger responses demonstrated a clear grasp of the theological and spiritual importance of the Eucharist. These candidates often referenced key concepts such as salvation, atonement, remembrance, and the crucifixion, highlighting how the Eucharist serves as a re-enactment or commemoration of Christ's sacrifice. They correctly identified the symbolism of the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ, and many understood the distinction between symbolic and ontological interpretations. The highest-level responses successfully analysed perspectives across a range of Christian denominations, including Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Quaker traditions. These answers incorporated appropriate vocabulary and technical terms, such as transubstantiation, transfiguration, *sola fide*, and references to the redeeming nature of Jesus' sacrifice. Such responses also explored how differing understandings of the Eucharist shape its significance in the lives of believers, whether as a sacrament essential to salvation or a symbolic act of obedience and remembrance.

However, a number of candidates demonstrated confusion about the nature of the Eucharist itself. Some conflated it with the sacraments more broadly, while others digressed into unrelated comparisons, arguing that other sacraments, such as marriage, were more significant, without properly analysing the Eucharist in its own right. Several responses were unfocused or repetitive, with candidates appearing to avoid repeating content from part (a) of the question. As a result, these answers lacked depth and structure, and failed to adequately address the evaluative demands of an AO2 question.

In summary, while many candidates showed a secure understanding of the topic and were able to offer thoughtful analysis, others would benefit from clearer guidance on how to distinguish between descriptive and analytical writing, and how to approach AO2 questions with a more focused evaluative framework.