



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

Pearson Edexcel Advanced Level
In Religious Studies (9RS0)
Paper 4B Christianity

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9RSO_4B Non-ERA Report

The overall standard of responses suggests that both candidates and centres are generally confident with the demands and intent of the specification. The majority of candidates demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding throughout the paper, with many responses reflecting an appropriate and effective use of resources. This allowed candidates across the ability range to approach the paper with confidence and tackle the questions in a positive and appropriate manner.

There were many worthy answers that exhibited a solid grasp of Christian beliefs, praxis, and theology. Candidates who were able to assess, analyse, and evaluate arguments typically performed well. Some of the strongest responses came from candidates who wrote less but had clearly planned their answers carefully, setting out their arguments from the outset in a structured and coherent way.

It was particularly pleasing to see the effective and accurate use of technical vocabulary across many responses. References to scholars were, in general, well-chosen and contributed meaningfully to the argumentation and discussion. However, in some instances, candidates included scholars in a seemingly random manner, offering little or no contribution to the development of their argument.

It was apparent that consideration by candidates of the precise wording of the question varied significantly especially for Q02 and Q03b where some candidates lost focus on the issue they were supposed to be engaging with.

Question 04, which includes the synoptic element of the course, saw some especially high-calibre responses. Candidates performing at the highest level demonstrated the ability to draw on a wide range of detailed and well-applied knowledge. These responses deconstructed the issues effectively and showed clear, sustained reasoning and judgement by evaluating the significance of differing views. Some excellent examples integrated relevant material from other components of the course with skill and relevance. The best candidates embedded these connections throughout their essays rather than merely adding brief, superficial references. As the synoptic element is not optional for accessing the full range of marks, it is essential that centres incorporate this requirement consistently into their teaching and learning throughout the course.

In conclusion, the responses indicate a generally strong understanding of the subject matter, thoughtful engagement with the specification, and, in many cases, a mature ability to construct and sustain critical and evaluative argumentation.

Q01 Explore the key features of Christian belief about the Nature of the Church (8)

Overall, this question was generally well answered. The majority of candidates demonstrated a solid understanding of Christian beliefs regarding the nature of the Church, with many responses referencing the four marks of the Church - one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These key features were frequently explained with clarity and accuracy, often accompanied by theological insight and relevant examples from Christian teaching and tradition. Many students were able to expand on each mark of the Church in some detail, explaining, for example, that the Church is one because it is united under one faith and one baptism; that it is holy because it is set apart for God's purposes and guided by the Holy Spirit; that it is catholic in the sense of being universal, open to all people at all times; and apostolic because it is founded on the teachings of the apostles and continues to be guided by their successors. This demonstrated an impressive depth of knowledge and understanding for an 8-mark question.

A significant number of responses were notably lengthy, often stretching to two pages or more. While the depth of these responses is commendable, candidates should be reminded that such extended answers are not necessary for questions worth 8 marks. Time spent on one question at the expense of others may not be the most effective exam strategy. Brevity and precision, paired with clear structure and focused content, are more appropriate for this type of question.

It is also worth noting that a proportion of candidates misinterpreted the question, writing about the church in the sense of a physical building rather than the theological concept of the Church as the community or body of believers united by faith in Jesus Christ. These responses tended to focus on what happens within the church building, such as worship, prayer, or the celebration of sacraments, rather than exploring the deeper theological understanding of the Church's nature and mission.

Responses generally showing a good level of understanding and appropriate use of specialist language and terminology. Centres are encouraged to continue reinforcing the distinction between the Church as a theological concept and the church as a place of worship, ensuring that students can apply this understanding accurately.

Q02 Assess the impact within Christianity made by the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement (12)

Candidates generally demonstrated a strong and well-developed understanding of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement, showing clear awareness of its historical origins, theological foundations, and distinctive forms of worship. Most responses reflected an accurate grasp of the development of the movement, from its roots in early 20th-century revivalism, particularly the Azusa Street Revival, to its widespread influence across global Christianity today. There was an excellent and confident use of specialist religious language and terminology throughout, most notably the use of the term *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), which was correctly applied in the context of spiritual gifts and charismatic worship practices.

Explanations of the movement's broader impact on Christianity were generally well-structured and clearly articulated. Many candidates successfully addressed its increasing appeal, particularly among younger and non-Western communities, as well as its dynamic and participatory worship style, which contrasts sharply with more traditional, liturgical forms of Christian worship. Additionally, candidates noted the movement's strong emphasis on evangelism and personal religious experience, highlighting how this has contributed to its rapid growth and appeal in diverse cultural contexts.

Balanced responses also explored some of the critiques and limitations associated with the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement. These included concerns that its emotionally charged worship can be perceived as overly experiential or lacking theological depth, and that it often diverges significantly from historical Christian traditions, especially in its rejection of formal liturgy and structured sacraments.

However, candidates who achieved lower marks typically failed to provide sufficient detail about the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement itself. Instead of directly addressing the movement's features and influence, some responses diverted their focus onto other theological or social movements, such as the feminist movement or Black / Liberation Theology. While these movements are indeed important in their own right, such discussions were not relevant to the specific demands of the question and did not contribute positively to the assessment criteria in this context.

Q03a Clarify the ideas illustrated in this passage about atonement (10)

The candidate responses to this question were, overall, outstanding. It is clear that the topic of atonement is both thoroughly taught by centres and well understood by the majority of candidates. In their answers, there was consistent and thoughtful reference to the extract provided, with key points carefully identified, interpreted, and then explored in considerable detail. A full and wide-ranging understanding of atonement was demonstrated across many scripts, often shown through the confident and accurate use of specialist theological language and terminology. Notably, terms such as etymological and soteriological were used effectively, suggesting not only a surface-level knowledge but a deeper grasp of the concepts involved.

Many responses went beyond basic explanation of Hick's key arguments, which served to further elucidate the theological dimensions of the topic. In doing so, candidates demonstrated the ability to engage thoughtfully with the material, and consider Hick's perspective within the wider context of Christian discourse.

Nearly all candidates were able to articulate clearly that the central theme of atonement involves the restoration of a broken relationship between humanity and God. Furthermore, many were able to elaborate on the different theological models of atonement, such as moral exemplar, penal substitution, and Christus Victor, showing a nuanced understanding of the diversity within Christian thought. The distinction between the broad and narrow meanings of atonement was also frequently made, and in the most sophisticated answers, candidates successfully integrated the views of other scholars or theological traditions that supported or expanded upon Hick's interpretation as outlined in the extract.

Q03b Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the substitution model of atonement (20)

Candidate responses to this question were varied in both depth and focus. Some were truly excellent, demonstrating a clear and confident ability to apply their knowledge in order to critically analyse both the strengths and weaknesses of the substitution model of atonement. These higher-level responses typically offered a well-developed and theologically informed explanation of the central idea that Jesus acted as a substitute for humanity, with his sacrificial death seen as essential for the redemption of humankind and the only way by which God's justice or wrath against sin could be fully satisfied. These candidates were often able to explain this within the broader context of Christian soteriology, drawing on scriptural references and historical theological development.

Moreover, these stronger responses often engaged with key criticisms of the substitution model, considering significant counter-arguments. For example, some candidates noted that this model appears to conflict with the concept of God's omnipotence, raising the question of whether God could have chosen another, less violent means of redemption. Others questioned whether the model aligns with the ethical and moral teachings of Jesus, such as the emphasis on forgiveness and love, and explored how the notion of substitution might challenge or obscure the doctrine of the Incarnation, particularly in relation to Jesus being fully God and fully human. In addition, many candidates at this level effectively integrated a range of scholarly perspectives, using them thoughtfully to present a balanced and well-supported evaluation. Scholars such as Anselm, Calvin, and more contemporary theologians were often cited, and their views were used to enrich the analysis on both sides of the debate.

However, responses at the lower end of the mark range were often less focused. While they sometimes included insightful comments, these candidates frequently digressed into broader discussions of alternative atonement theories, such as the ransom theory or the moral exemplar model, presenting these as more convincing without directly evaluating the substitution model itself. Although such comparisons can be useful when used to highlight specific limitations of substitutionary atonement, many of these responses lost sight of the central question, which required a focused and critical analysis of the substitution model in particular. This lack of precision often limited the depth of analysis and reduced the overall effectiveness of the argument.

Q04 Evaluate the impact that the Ecumenical Movement has had within Christianity (30)

This question elicited a wide range of responses, reflecting a varied level of engagement and understanding. Among the strongest responses, there was very effective use of scholarly material, with many candidates confidently referencing key theologians and ecumenical developments. These high-level answers demonstrated detailed and accurate knowledge of the Ecumenical Movement, often including a well-informed account of its historical background, such as its roots in the early 20th century and key moments like the formation of the World Council of Churches. In addition, candidates were able to discuss a range of initiatives and aims of the movement, including inter-faith dialogue, cooperative social action, and efforts to promote Christian unity in practice and doctrine. The best answers did not merely recount facts but also included evaluative commentary, assessing the impact, challenges, and ongoing relevance of the movement. There was also clear use of specialist and technical language, which strengthened the academic tone of these responses.

However, weaker responses often lacked focus and misinterpreted the question's demands. A common issue (seen elsewhere in the paper), was that some candidates concentrated heavily on the claim that other movements, namely feminism, Black theology, and liberation theology, had been more effective in addressing divisions or issues within Christianity. While these movements are important, their inclusion here indicated a misunderstanding of the question, which was specifically concerned with its aims and impact, rather than a comparison with unrelated movements or trends.

Another recurring issue in lower-level responses was the tendency to treat the Ecumenical Movement as though it were a distinct Christian denomination. This led to simplistic answers that described the beliefs or worship practices of various groups as if they were being compared to a separate church, rather than analysing the movement's efforts to bridge theological and practical differences across denominations. As a result, these answers tended to remain at a descriptive or superficial level, lacking the depth of evaluation seen in stronger responses.

Importantly, candidates are reminded that questions of this nature require a synoptic link to either Philosophy of Religion or Religion and Ethics. This connection should be substantial and integrated, rather than only a passing mention. In many weaker responses, where links were attempted, they were often incorrectly aligned, typically referencing issues of equality or feminism under the umbrella of Religion and Ethics. While these topics may be relevant elsewhere, they did not directly support the required analysis of the Ecumenical Movement in this instance.

That said, there were also some very well-executed synoptic links. Notably, a number of stronger responses made insightful use of concepts from the Philosophy of Religion, such as Wittgenstein's theory of language games, to explain how different theological frameworks or paradigms can complicate efforts toward unity. This approach demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of both the theoretical and practical challenges facing the Ecumenical Movement and showed an ability to integrate material across different areas of study in a meaningful and relevant way.