

A-LEVEL RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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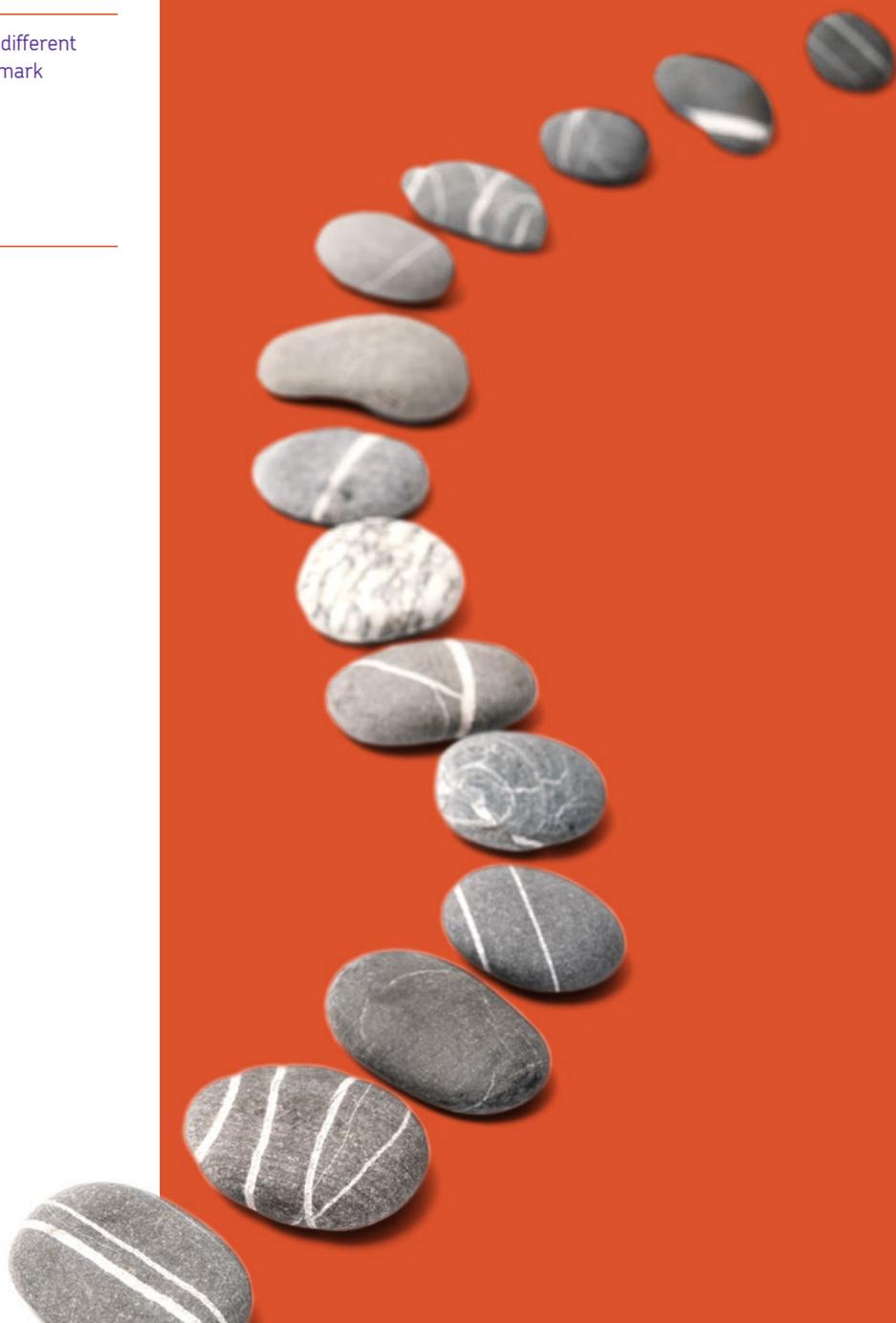
Example responses and commentaries

Paper 2B Christianity

See a range of student responses that demonstrate how different levels are achieved and understand how to interpret the mark scheme.

Version 1.0 Autumn 2019

EXAMPLE RESPONSES



10 mark questions: A01

Levels of response mark scheme

Level and marks	Description
Level 5 9-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge and critical understanding is accurate, relevant and fully developed in breadth and depth with very good use of detailed and relevant evidence which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate• Where appropriate, good knowledge and understanding of the diversity of views and/or scholarly opinion is demonstrated• Clear and coherent presentation of ideas with precise use of the appropriate subject vocabulary
Level 4 7-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge and critical understanding is accurate and mostly relevant with good development in breadth and depth shown through good use of relevant evidence which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate.• Where appropriate, alternative views and/or scholarly opinion are explained• Mostly clear and coherent presentation of ideas with good use of the appropriate subject vocabulary
Level 3 5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge and critical understanding is generally accurate and relevant with development in breadth and/or depth shown through some use of evidence and/or examples which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate• Where appropriate, there is some familiarity with the diversity of views and/or scholarly opinion• Some organisation of ideas and coherence with reasonable use of the appropriate subject vocabulary
Level 2 3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge and critical understanding is limited, with limited development in breadth and/or depth shown through limited use of evidence and/or examples which may include textual/scriptural references where appropriate• Where appropriate, limited reference may be made to alternative views and/or scholarly opinion• Limited organisation of ideas and coherence and use of subject vocabulary
Level 1 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge and critical understanding is basic with little or no development• There may be a basic awareness of alternative views and/or scholarly opinion• Isolated elements of accurate and relevant information and basic use of appropriate subject vocabulary
0	No accurate or relevant material to credit

0 1 . 1

Examine how secularisation has challenged Christianity

[10 marks]

Historically, the Church's role in societies and state control has been significant. However, today in western societies the role and power has been, and is being, minimised as a result of multiple challenges by secularisation.

For example, Christianity is primarily valued due to its moral understandings and how its doctrines can influence how a Christian should live life morally, with the ten commandments and other old testament teachings laying the foundations for societal moral understandings. However, the emergence of philosophies such as humanism challenge the thought that Christianity is necessary in the practice of humans establishing and living by what is moral. It is claimed that humans can gain their own moral consciences, be it through instinct or experience and that religion is no longer needed.

This is further strengthened by the claim that Christianity has been the primary cause of a great number of wars in history. The fact that some of the most evil things in the world such as the crusades were Christian implies that Christianity should not be the standard bearer for morality.

Enlightenment on these issues and a furthering need for democratisation has challenged the authority of the Church. For example, the Church has lost political power in the UK and in the USA. A decrease in Church power as a result of liberal prominence is demonstrated by declining church attendance figures as freedom of religion can be expressed, as well as religion becoming a personal matter that has been relegated to a personal sphere. The emergence of house churches as an alternative to traditional churches demonstrates this relegation as religion becomes less of a communal matter.

Furthermore, the right to express religion freely is not necessarily enough to cause such declining figures of attendance. Scientific breakthroughs such as evolution and the Big Bang theory have led to less of a reliance on the Church to explain the world and the universe, with state education taking a primarily secular standpoint now.

These theistic challenges to Christianity are shown by movements such as 'Fresh Expressions' that now offer acts of morality as a bridge to faith, leaving any theistic beliefs as secondary. This implies sections of Christianity now recognising the relevance of morality over an understanding of God in a more secular society.

In conclusion, secularisation has challenged Christianity on both moral and theistic fronts. The emergence of liberal ideas show that the Church has not historically been so moral whilst the furthering of science strongly questions whether God exists. Both challenges have significantly decreased the prominence of Christianity in Western Society.

Expression is clear, but not succinct and neither the introduction nor the conclusion really add to the answer. At 426 words, this is longer than expected in the time available.

However, this answer is relevant with the material being tightly link to the target of the question, has appropriate breadth and depth and unpacks its ideas with examples.

Level 5, 10 marks.

0 2 . 1

Examine developments in Christian ideas of 'mission'.

[10 marks]

The 'mission' is the aim of the Church which Christians should follow. As the Church has developed over time with new leaders so has the mission.

During the rule of the British Empire, the Church would go to the colonies to help the poor. It set up hospitals to improve health care, schools to improve education and Churches to promote Christianity. The Church's mission was to help poor communities and bring God to their lives. A key part of the Christian mission is to evangelise which means to preach and spread the word of God. Everything that was set up was through God and the Church wanted these poor people to know it. A lot of the communities that were helped were in India where hospitals, schools and churches remain.

The mission of the Church today is not as clear. Christians are meant to take part in charity and give to the poor but large scale schemes such as those that took place during the rule of the British Empire are not as prominent. The responsibility of the mission has moved from the Church to the individual. Christians must now carry out the mission in their everyday lives. The mission is open to interpretation but is known as carrying out God's work on earth. By carrying out the mission Christians hope to be rewarded in Heaven. The ultimate Christian mission is to be with God in Heaven.

At 237 words this is a shorter answer than expected in 18 minutes. The paragraph on the Church in the British Empire gives a general account of what 'mission' was, but the next paragraph is very vague. There appears to be a very general understanding of 'mission' but nothing concrete. There is no sense that evangelism continues, of the role of the Churches and Christian organisations in mission today, which would have worked well as an example of what the answer considers to be mission. It needed a greater awareness of 'mission' in the Church today to be a Level 4 answer, as these responses should show good development of ideas with good use of relevant evidence.

Level 3. 6 marks

15 mark questions: A02

Levels of response mark scheme

Level and marks	Description
Level 5 13-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A very well-focused response to the issue(s) raised• Perceptive discussion of different views, including, where appropriate, those of scholars or schools of thought with critical analysis• There is an appropriate evaluation fully supported by the reasoning• Precise use of the appropriate subject vocabulary
Level 4 10-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A well-focused response to the issue(s) raised• Different views are discussed, including, where appropriate, those of scholars or schools of thought, with some critical analysis• There is an appropriate evaluation supported by the reasoning• Good use of the appropriate subject vocabulary
Level 3 7-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A general response to the issue(s) raised• Different views are discussed, including, where appropriate, those of scholars or schools of thought• An evaluation is made that is consistent with some of the reasoning• Reasonable use of the appropriate subject vocabulary
Level 2 4-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A limited response to the issue(s) raised• Presentation of a point of view relevant to the issue with some supporting evidence and argument• Limited attempt at the appropriate use of subject vocabulary
Level 1 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A basic response to the issue(s) raised• A point of view is stated, with some evidence or reason(s) in support• Some attempt at the appropriate use of subject vocabulary
0	No accurate or relevant material to credit

0 1 . 2

Christianity has no successful defence against secularisation.

[15 marks]

Secularisation is the concept of society becoming less religious. It has been brought about by the rise in science which means that there is no need for a 'God of the gaps'. Secularisation has directly challenged Christianity as modern beliefs oppose the traditional teachings and practices of the Church therefore the Church has been unable to defend itself against secularisation.

Christianity has no successful defence against secularisation as laws are now secular and are not made based on faith. Abortion, contraception and homosexuality are now all legal in the UK (excluding Northern Ireland for abortion) even though Church teachings may disagree. The Church can protest, and speak out against these laws, but most people agree with the laws. However, the Christian Church has an historical part in law making in Britain which means that there are still seats in the House of Lords, that are reserved for Church of England Bishops. Therefore the Church is able to influence law and decision making. Legally, Christianity is also protected under the 2010 Equality Act as a religion. Although the Church may play a role in decision-making, it is a small one and not enough to successfully stop secular laws. The Church does not have enough power to stop or overturn laws and therefore no successful defence against secularisation.

Secularisation has been caused by the rise in science. Dawkins would say that science eliminates the need for religion. He states that religion and science are incompatible and so people can only believe in one. Since Christianity has no successful defence against science, it has no successful defence against secularisation. McGrath disagrees with Dawkins and says that religion and science can be compatible. He gives the examples of Francis Collins who is a leading scientist but also a Christian. Pope Francis has stated that religion and science can work together. Although the Church may now try to promote the relationship between Christianity and science, as science advances it will be more convincing that Christianity and secularism will continue to rise

In conclusion, although Christianity may currently still be the largest faith with well over 1 Billion Christians in the world, secularisation in Britain has caused Church attendance to drop dramatically. Christianity has not been convincing enough to make people believe they need the Church, therefore Christianity has no successful defence against secularisation.

400 words – a satisfactory length in the time available, but the first paragraph is not relevant in directly answering the question.

Aside from the first paragraph, this is very well focused and, as the structure of the second paragraph shows, there is critical analysis. Here the structure is point, supporting evidence, counter argument, comment on counter argument.

The next paragraph is not so focused with some issues in the organisation of ideas. The final sentence of the paragraph is rather confused perhaps due to the pressure of the examination situation, however, it is fairly clear, what the student intended to say.

There are clearly arguments, counter-arguments and critical analysis, and it is well-focused on the issue.

Level 5, 13 marks

0 1 . 2

'Christianity's attitude to other faiths is generally positive.'

Evaluate this claim.

[15 marks]

As there are many other faiths it means that Christianity has a lot of 'competition' and a lot of different attitudes to the other faiths such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Jews, These other faiths are all very different from each other.

Some people believe that Christian attitudes towards other faiths is fairly positive because they believe in the rule 'treat others as you want to be treated'. If Christians want to be respected and accepted then they have to do the same to the other faiths. This means that they have to be positive to other faiths to get positivity back.

However, some people see that as actually being quite selfish as they may just be doing it so that other faiths can essentially 'big them up'. This can mean that the positivity that Christians give out isn't actually very genuine and if the other faiths realise this then conflict can actually arise from that which could lead to an even bigger divide between the faiths thus straying away further from actually all living together peacefully.

Overall, I believe that Christianity's attitude towards other faiths is generally negative as I don't believe that they allow room for your own thoughts and its more so 'our way is right and that's final'. Because of this other faiths do not really get along with Christians due to conflicting ideas.

227 words – a short answer in the time available. There are clearly two points of view, although a limited answer. The idea that Christians have to earn respect in society by showing respect themselves, is valid and is related to Christian teaching. The suggestion that this is no more than 'show' is also supported with development.

Level 3, 7 marks

25 mark questions

Target: AO1:4: Knowledge and understanding of approaches to the study of religion and belief. (10 marks)

Target: AO2: Analyse and evaluate aspects of, and approaches to, religion and belief, including their significance, influence and study. (15 marks)

Material related to AO1 and AO2 may be presented discretely or holistically within the answer. Markers must read the whole of the response before either mark is awarded.

0 6 . 1

'For both Christianity and Virtue Ethics, genetic engineering is wrong.'

Critically examine and evaluate this view with reference to the dialogue between Christianity and Virtue Ethics.

[25 marks]

I agree that Genetic engineering for Christianity and virtue ethics is wrong. This is because Christians believe that an embryo is a potential human life therefore they cannot be used to experiment on. After 14 days personhood develops and the embryo is considered a human so any destroying of embryos could be considered as murder. Murder would break one of the ten commandments which is vital for Christian beliefs and could never be justified. Also Genetic engineering would be a way of playing God as only God can create and give life. Humans should not mess with Gods work. Fundamentalists believe that God makes no mistakes therefore altering embryos goes against Gods original plans. Only God can give life and take life as all humans are made in Gods image.

Virtue ethics reject genetic engineering based on the fact that it could never be the act of a virtuous person. After 14 days the embryo is a potential life and the longer the embryo has been existing the more rights the embryo has. Destroying embryos during experiments could never be the act of a good person. Aristotle believes genetic engineering is wrong as it could lead to a race of superhumans. This means that people would eventually have designer babies and there would be a lot of discrimination in society. Poor people would less likely to afford genetic engineering and only the rich people would be at an advantage. Therefore anyone who supported this could never achieve Eudaimonia as it is not a virtuous act.

For Christians the sanctity of life means that Genetic engineering is wrong. However in some special cases it can be accepted. Genetic engineering could be used to get rid of any terrible Genetic diseases that could cause great suffering to a child. Such as Parkinsons disease. If diseases like these are being removed to provide humans with a better quality of life them it couldn't be wrong. It is true to Jesus teaching of 'love thy neighbour' Jesus said that it's important to love your neighbour therefore the most loving thing to do would be that to remove a deadly disease. Also it's true to Fletcher's situation ethics which is derived from Jesus teaching. Agape love is the unconditional love and applying this to Genetic engineering means that it is justified. Also Christians believe that for humans to be able to carry out genetic engineering is due to Gods will. It's God given skills which we should use to improve the quality of life for people. This is true to what Jesus did as he healed people. Therefore Genetic engineering is true to Jesus teaching as it's 'healing' people in a sense that they have a better quality of life.

Genetic engineering isn't always wrong for virtue ethics. It all depends on whether the action is virtuous or not. Like Christians if virtue ethics have good intentions then

the act is virtuous. Saving the lives of people from diseases can only be the act of some who is virtuous therefore Aristotle would believe Genetic engineering is right. He believed that the highest aspect in human life was intelligence and so we should use the world around us and scientific investigation to find out more about the world. Therefore genetic engineering is true to virtue ethics. In conclusion I believe that virtue ethics and Christianity can agree with Genetic engineering as long as the way it's carried out has the best intentions and the end result is good.

This is a relatively short answer in the time available (45 minutes) at around 580 words.

AO1

The key areas of the answer that can be assessed as AO1 show knowledge and understanding of genetic engineering, relevant Christian teachings and Virtue Ethics, although it is stronger on genetic engineering and Christian teaching. It is more than generally accurate and relevant, and there is some explanation of alternative views and some development. These qualities means that it best matches Level 4.

AO2

The structure of the answer looked promising, however, the answer is basically a summary of arguments in favour followed by a summary of arguments against and the final conclusion simply states which is preferred. There is no attempt at critical analysis, no attempt to justify why one set of arguments might over-rule the other. The two sets of arguments for each approach simply contradict each other.

AO1 Level 4, 7 marks

AO2 Level 2, 9 marks

Total: 16 marks

0 3 - 1

'The fact that the world exists makes it reasonable for Christians to believe in God.'

Critically examine and evaluate this view with reference to the dialogue between Christianity and philosophy.

[25 marks]

I agree with the world existing making Christians faith reasonable in God. Paley's design argument shows how this is valid. The world we are living in is so perfect and finely tuned to allow humans to live in it would be ridiculous to assume that no one created the world. All the laws of nature working together show how belief in God is reasonable. Paley used the analogy of the watch to illustrate his point. He believed if you stumbled across a clock you wouldn't assume it just happened by chance, but rather you would come to the conclusion that a intelligent watch maker designed it since all the parts are working so perfectly together. Similarly the universe is so perfect and it couldn't have simply occurred by chance so the only being great and intelligent to design the universe is God. Also the fact that this is an inductive argument means we can observe the world and how perfect it is for ourselves. Most things in life based on inductive argument are true beyond reasonable doubt therefore belief in God is valid.

However there are many objections to Paley's design argument so therefore it can never be a hundred percent true. It is based on observation and no empirical evidence. Also humans have no idea about what a 'perfect' universe is so we can't say that it is a perfect world. Many people believe that if it is possible for vegetable to grow by themselves then why can't it be the same for God. Also there is evidence for the Big Bang which shows how the universe could have occurred without God. The Universe could have simply occurred by chance so belief in God is not reasonable.

Also the amount of evil and suffering shows how there can not be a God. God is a being who is omnipotent omnibenevolent so how is it possible that such a being would allow millions of people to suffer everyday. Also the amount of evil and the pointlessness of evil shows how no God exists at all. This is shown by the inconsistent triad; God is omnipotent, God is omnibenevolent, and evil exists. These three statements do not go together and show how God does not exist.

Augustine and Aquinas reject that evil shows God doesn't exist. Augustine that evil is simply the absence of good the same way dark is the absence of light. Aquinas goes on to say that evil is the absence of something that is natural to something eg. Blindness in a rock would never be wrong but in a human it would be intrinsically evil as it's natural. Therefore belief in God is valid and can exist with evil.

The evidence for the Big Bang Theory shows how we do not need God for the explanation of the universe. There is proof to show how millions of years ago a burst of energy created the world we live in simply by chance. The fact that this is empirically proved shows God does not exist.

Many Christians don't think that the big bang diminishes the probability of God existing. They believe that the Big Bang happened through God's laws and will. Therefore is compatible with Christianity. Young creationists reject this idea as it goes against the ineffable word of God. Old creationists believe that it is compatible and in the Genesis a day could mean an era rather than a period of 24 hours. Most Christians agree with the fact that the Big bang theory provides the explanation to how the universe came about with strong evidence but does not explain why the universe was created. Therefore there is a strong probability that God created the universe.

Richard Dawkins shows how we do not need God for the explanation of the world and how humans came about. He introduced the theory of evolution. He believed that all humans started out as apes and over millions of years evolved into humans. The best genes survived and the rest died out. So God is not needed as an explanation of how the world came about.

This view is opposed by young creationist as it's not true to the Genesis story which is in the bible. This is the ineffable word of God so cannot be wrong. Young creationist hold a different view and say this explains why simpler life came about but doesn't explain how humans came about. Humans are more special and rational beings so we are created by God in Gods image. In addition Michael Behe says that if the bacteria is modified in anyway such as the flagellum is removed it would no longer function therefore evolution is unlikely to have happened. However Michael received a lot of backlash as the was weak science. Catholics believe that the big bang theory is compatible with Christianity as God brought about the big bang. Therefore God is still needed as he is the one to bring about evolution.

In conclusion I believe that the world makes it reasonable to believe in God as we can see how well everything works together and how this could not have occurred by chance without God.

Around 860 words – a good length under examination conditions.

AO1

The key areas of the answer that can be assessed for AO1 include knowledge and understanding of the design argument, and some criticisms of it; the problem of evil, which includes ideas about the concept of God; the concept of evil as the absence of good, and the views of scholars, including creationist views. This is a well-informed answer, but there are a few slips – for example the theory of evolution is attributed to Dawkins.

AO2

The structure of the answer does support critical analysis, because the specific arguments proposed are challenged. It does, at times fall back into making claims without supporting them, for example, 'most things in life based on inductive argument are true beyond reasonable doubt'; and summarising opposing points of view, such as evolution vs young earth creationism, without giving clear reasons for preferring one over the other.

AO1 Level 5, 9 marks

AO2 Level 4, 12 marks

Total: 21 marks

0 4 . 1

'Christian statements about God are non-cognitive.'

Critically examine and evaluate this view with reference to the dialogue between Christianity and philosophy.

[25 marks]

PLAN

- God is transcendent/creator/sustainer (one God)
 - Wholly other
 - Omnipotent/omniscient/omnibenevolent
 - Trinity/God Head three persons (Hypostases)
 - Personal/loving/father/king
 - Cognitive = factual -> causes problems if religious statements are non cognitive (weak verification)
 - Verification (Ayers) +falsification (Popper) = religious statements = not cognitive
 - John hick (Eschatological verification) = cognitive
 - Non cognitive
 - Wittgenstein (language games) = non cognitive
 - Hare (Bliks = non cognitive = belief of the world)
- =Christian statements about God focus on a different reality something we cannot knowable talk about(via negative/analogy/symbol)

Christian statements about God tend to promote the idea that God has the attributes of classical theism. This is the belief that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. These characteristics of God show that he is a being that holds the power and the ability to create and sustain the earth. This is emphasises the idea that God was the creator of the earth and the universe and this is the reason for our existence. Philosophy aims to split language into what is cognitive and non-cognitive to identify what can be regarded as meaningful and truthful. Cognitive statements are factual and can be proven through verification and falsification principles. Non cognitive statements focuses on language that displays emotion and opinion and therefore aren't factual due to their inability on being able to be verified or falsified. Therefore there are differing interpretations on whether statements about God are no cognitive or cognitive since this has a significant effect on the believers idea of their religion.

The Christian ideas that God created the universe, and is the first cause due to his all powerful abilities, suggests that Christians are making cognitive claims about the nature of God and his role in the universe. Philosophy therefore subjects these claims to the principles of verification and falsification, since for statements to have any value they must be factually true. However due to scientific evidence that the big bang is the cause of the universe and has expanded progressively over time, it suggests that methods of scientific and empirical testing have falsified the beliefs of these statements that God is the creator. This therefore suggests that methods of scientific and empirical testing have falsified the beliefs of these statements that God is the creator. This therefore suggests that due to Karl Poppers principle of falsification the statement has been proven false and therefore holds no cognitive

value or status. This therefore suggests that developments of principles that statements are subject to verification and falsification, therefore reduce the ideas of Christian statements about God to be merely cognitive. However, John Hick's theory of eschatological verification suggests that statements about God can be cognitive. Christian statements about God often propose that he has the power to forgive sins and that it is through God sacrificing Jesus, that humans are able to attain universal salvation. Christian statements therefore propose that God will provide us with eternal life with him in heaven. John Hick would therefore counter the criticisms of the principle of verification and falsification through suggesting Christian statements are eschatologically valid. Hick suggests that at the end of time and after judgement Christian claims about God will be either verified or falsified. This is because if we end up in a resurrected body after death, it will be clear that God was omnipotent and God was able to provide us with eternal life as you could verify if it happens. Hick demonstrates this view through the analogy of the 'Celestial City'.

Christian ideas about God also emphasise that he is a transcendent being and is referred to as the 'wholly other' since he isn't limited within the elements of space and time in the universe. Christians also believe that there is one God who exists as three persons, this is called hypostases. The trinity proposes that God exists as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The father is often thought by Christians to be the person who created us and sent us his son, God the son is Jesus incarnate, which is often used as humans example for how we should live our life, and the holy spirit is the aspect of God's power that is active within the church. Philosophy would therefore propose that these statements about God are non-cognitive as God is transcendent, and the fact that it is difficult to comprehend how God exists as three persons. Hare's argument that religious language are bliks would suggest that Christian statements about God are non-cognitive. This is because a Christian blik is dependent on the believers interpretation of the world and therefore despite any criticism or contradictory evidence the believer receives they will still maintain the idea that these statements about God's existence are true. Therefore as a result of this Hare would assert that religious believers hold a sane blik where they can justify beliefs through personal interpretation of the world. Therefore as the assertion of these statements are dependent on your faith and belief this means that statements about God are non cognitive. The principle of verification introduces the idea of weak verification. This could show that statements about God are verifiable in principle and can therefore become weakly verified. This is because scientific determinism proposes that all things in the universe have a cause and therefore all current events are the result of an anterior state. This would therefore suggest that there must be a start to the world as all things are caused. Therefore it may be possible to weakly verify that God is the creator of the universe as it is clear that in principle everything needs to have a cause so therefore if there was a way in detecting a metaphysical being that retains its own cause through being a necessary being then God could exist and this can be a factual claim.

In conclusion, God is seen to be described using characteristics that are paradoxical such as he is personal and immanent, yet transcendent and he is loving and exists in three persons. Therefore, the language is likely to be non cognitive as these claims can't be claimed to be cognitive due to there being contradictions with scientific thought and current knowledge. However these statements of God can still retain their meaning through the use of Wittgenstein's language games that suggests religious language has its rules and instructs its own 'form of life'. Therefore statements about God can be seen as different to the use of everyday language and not subject to the criticisms of scientific emphasis on evidence.

Around 1000 words – a good length in the time available (45 minutes total for writing and planning).

Both AO1 and AO2 achieve Level 5. There is an extensive plan which is often the case with high level Dialogues answers. The student seems to have wanted to mention every view of the nature of religious language that they had studied – but this was not necessary.

AO1

The key areas of the answer that can be assessed for AO1 include knowledge and understanding of: Christian statements about God; the meaning of cognitive and non-cognitive; verification and falsification; eschatological verification; blik and language games. This is an impressive selection of relevant material and the level of understanding is generally very good.

AO2

The structure of the answer is effective, although some paragraphs are over-long and would have benefited from being broken down.

However, the material is relevant and there is a good attempt at critical analysis. There is no evaluation of Hick's ideas about eschatological verification, and it is debatable how far they justify the claim that statements about God are cognitive. The section on God's transcendence and the Trinity are a very detailed display of relevant AO1 material, but the argument here is not clear.

AO1 Level 5, 10 marks

AO2 Level 5, 13 marks

Total: 23 marks

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'Christian ethics is character based.'

Critically examine and evaluate this view with reference to the dialogue between Christianity and ethical studies.

[25 marks]

PLAN

- VE is character based = Aristotle
- NML = deontological absolute = Aquinas' teaching and use by Catholic Church = focused on rules
- Courage wisdom justice temperance = VE & NML
- SE = relative & teleological image of god – utilitarianism
 - Christian ethics = love God/love thy neighbour help in oppressed, bring Gods kingdom of earth be charitable not about materialism.
 - DCT =God

Ethical theories can be regarded as character based if the moral agent has autonomy to decide what actions are best and make moral decisions to become a better person. There are other approaches to ethical theories such as these that are deontological, which means the ethical theory is focused on rules and our moral duty to do right by following the rules to produce a good action. Some ethical theories are also regarded to be teleological which is where they focus on deciding which action is morally right depending on the outcome and if it achieves its final purpose. Christian ethics is often understood through following the example of Jesus' teaching and following the 10 commandments. This could propose that Christian ethics is more deontological since the actions that are perceived as right have been made clear through Jesus' example and the absolute rules.

Natural moral law was proposed by Aquinas and is adopted and used by the Catholic Church. This is a deontological theory which suggests that the ethical decisions made by Christians should be made according to the absolute primary precepts. The five primary precepts are the preserve life, reproduce, worship God, live in an ordered society and educate Children. This therefore suggests that Christian ethics are in fact deontological rather than character based as the main principle is that moral goodness is achieved through following rules. However, Christian ethics can be seen to encourage the idea of carrying out actions that benefit all people in society as we are all made in the image of God as proposed by the Imago Dei doctrine. This therefore suggests that Christian ethics may in fact be character based as it emphasises that we should use our reason to decide what is right rather than following strict rules. Jesus set this example through the claim that "man was not made for Sabbath" suggesting that the rules don't dictate to us, but rather what is right for all people. This therefore seems to suggest that Christian ethics is more agent centred and links to virtue ethics theory proposed by Aristotle. This is because Aristotle emphasises that our actions are to be compatible with the rest of society as too much of a characteristic is a vice and negatively impacts society. Therefore the idea that virtue ethics gives more autonomy to the individual to achieve *arête* and become a good person through developing virtues is in line with the teachings of Christianity. This is because doing good works through exercising reason (*phronesis*), which is a God given trait means that we will be able to become good people and reach heaven.

Christian ethics is also linked to following Jesus' example in the new testament who sided and helped the oppressed. This suggests that we should focus on carrying out the six works of mercy and following the two greatest commandments which is to "love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" and to "love thy neighbour". This therefore suggests that Christian ethics is about helping those less fortunate than us and bringing about God's kingdom on earth. The idea that we should be charitable is also something that Christian ethics focuses on as it suggests that material possessions distract us from being good people and truly hearing God's message. This understanding of Christian ethics suggests that Christian ethics are character based because it regards the intentions of your actions as important and focuses on the individuals ability to develop the qualities that will help them get into heaven through the choices they make in life. This emphasises that good actions are a multi-track disposition and cannot be formed by only doing good actions once. This therefore suggests that Christian ethics is focused on the moral and spiritual progression of a person throughout life rather than following the rules only to be entered into heaven at judgement. This suggests Christian ethics has a 'telos' which is to achieve eternal life with God. However, others would argue that because Jesus gives us the two greatest commandments, these still act as a guide for how we should live and the rules we should follow. This therefore suggests that Christian ethics isn't agent centres as the Bible provides absolute guidance on how we should live our lives. Catholics therefore have to follow the rules proposed by the magisterium due to the principle of apostolic succession which suggests only they can interpret the bible and deduce what actions are right or wrong. Therefore, despite Jesus' actions being different from the social norms and rules of his time, he was still following his duty of loving God and loving thy neighbour suggesting these are the rules Christians must follow at all times.

In conclusion, Christian ethics is primarily based on the idea of agape love which is advocated in Fletchers situation ethics. This can be seen through the fundamental belief of Christianity that God sacrificed his son for us. This action of unselfish love for humanity suggests that the main guideline of all Christian decision making is to promote love as Jesus did for us. This may suggest that Christian ethics is more teleological than character best. However, it cannot be disregarded that natural moral law offers the main guidelines of how people should behave according to God's will, so despite being character based by trying to become virtuous the way you achieve that is by following rules. Therefore it could be argued Christian ethics is still majority deontological.

This is a maximum mark answer and its structure can be summarised as follows:

- 'Ethical theories can be regarded as character based if the moral agent has autonomy to decide what actions are best and make moral decisions to become a better person.
- Natural moral law suggests that Christian ethics are deontological.
- Jesus' example suggests that it is character based, not rule based.
- Christian ethics modelled on example of Jesus and stressing intention, so character based.
- However, Jesus gave the two greatest commandments, Bible provides absolute guidance – Loving God and Neighbour are absolute rules.
- Christian ethics based on agape – could be seen as teleological rather than character based, but NML and stress on absolute rules suggests more deontological.

AO1 Level 5, 10 marks

AO2 Level 5, 15 marks

Total: 25 marks

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