



GCSE AQA Religious Studies A Practice Papers

Component 2: Thematic Studies
Theme D: Religion, Peace and Conflict

Update v1.2, October 2025

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Teacher's Introduction

This resource consists of a selection of practice exam-style questions and mark schemes for **Theme D: Religion, Peace and Conflict** of the AQA Specification A, Paper 2A: the religious, philosophical and ethical themes paper for the non-textual studies route through the qualification.

Across the range of Practice Exams for themes A–F, the questions are numbered as per the specimen materials and past papers published by AQA, so that all three examples for each theme have the same question number. So all three examples for theme D in this resource are numbered '04', for example.

The 'themes' questions can be answered from any religious perspective; they are general questions rather than focused on or targeted at a single religion. Indicative material from all six religions available for study is, therefore, included in the mark schemes.

The mark scheme content given is indicative, meaning that it includes a selection of material deemed likely to appear across a range of candidate responses, but they do not seek to list all possible material exhaustively. No particular branch or denomination of a religious tradition is required by the specification or expected in responses to questions; any correct, relevant material can be used.

The cover sheet provided at the start of each theme A practice exam divides the total timing by four, in order to replicate the time that AQA recommends students spend on each of the four themes in the real exam (25 minutes). Marks are divided in the same way.

A cover sheet for the full exam (all four themes) is provided at the end of this resource, should you wish to purchase all four themes and construct a complete paper from these.

January 2019

Update v1.2, October 2025

As per the exam board assessment updates, the following changes have been made to these papers:

- "contrasting" replaced with "different" in the 4 mark question
- 5-mark question replaced with a 6-mark question
- 2-mark question reduced to a 1-mark question

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Schemes of Assessment

Assessment Objectives

- Assessment Objective 1 has three elements, one of which is assessed in each of the first four questions for each theme. These questions will always require knowledge and understanding of religion. These three components of AO1 are:
 - ✓ AO1(1) Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including practices and sources of authority
 - ✓ AO1(2) Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including influence on individuals, communities and society
 - ✓ AO1(3) Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief, including differences and similarities between and within religions
- Assessment Objective 2 is always assessed via the 12-mark questions. The objective is to analyse and evaluate aspects of religion, including their significance and influence.

Allocation of Marks

Questions assessing Assessment Objective 1 are worth 1, 1, 4 and 6 marks. Responses to these are not judged according to levels of response but are points-marked, with marks awarded according to the amount of knowledge demonstrated and the ways in which it is deployed in relation to the question.

A mark is awarded for a correct point, up to the number of points requested by the question.

Where there are 4 marks available, the question specifies that two distinct points must be made to answer it adequately. Each one of those two points can gain a mark if it is correct and relevant. A second mark is also available for each of these points, and that mark is given for appropriate development or explanation beyond the basic statement which gained the first mark.

For the 6-mark questions the final mark available is awarded for the reference to sources or teachings as required by the question. One mark is awarded for naming a relevant source of authority, and one mark for the application. Each mark can be awarded individually, and if the source is both named and applied, then two marks should be awarded.

Questions assessing Assessment Objective 2 are 12-mark questions. Marks are allocated according to the following levels of response:

One point of view stated, with limited justification	1–3 marks	(12 marks) Plus, a possible 3 marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG)
Different arguments for and against, with justification OR several linked and justified arguments supporting one position This is the highest level which can be reached if only one point of view is considered or there is no mention of religion	4–6 marks	
Good arguments on either side of the issue, well justified and linked together Clear reference to religion	7–9 marks	
Very well argued. Arguments on either side are linked together and fully justified, leading to a reasoned conclusion Clear and appropriate reference to religion applied to the question	10–12 marks	

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Marks are awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. These marks are awarded based on the candidates' responses to the 12-mark questions only. The best of these marks will be included in the candidates' total for the paper.

No response is given OR the response contains no material relevant to the question asked OR the spelling, punctuation and grammar demonstrated in the response do not meet threshold performance	0 marks	
Spelling and punctuation are reasonably accurate Any errors in grammar do not hinder the overall communication of meaning A limited range of appropriate specialist terms is used	1 mark	Threshold
Spelling and punctuation are mainly accurate The rules of grammar are used to give an overall clarity of meaning A good range of appropriate specialist terms is used	2 marks	Intermediate
Spelling and punctuation are consistently accurate The rules of grammar are used effectively to control and communicate meaning A wide range of specialist terms is used	3 marks	High

Religious Studies

Paper 2A: Non-textual Studies

Theme D: Religion, Peace and Conflict

Practice Paper 1

Time allowed

25 minutes

Instructions

Answer **all** of the questions.

Information

The total number of marks available for this paper is **24** plus an additional **3** marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be assessed in the 12-mark question.

Question	Maximum Marks
01.1	1
01.2	1
01.3	4
01.4	6
01.5	12
Total	24
SpaG	3

- 04.1 Which of the following is a weapon of mass destruction?
- A) Nuclear bomb B) Landmine C) Machine gun
- 04.2 Give **one** way in which religious believers express pacifist views.
- 04.3 Explain **two** different beliefs in contemporary British society about religion. You should make reference to at least one religious tradition in your answer.
- 04.4 Explain **two** religious teachings about holy war. Refer to Scripture or other sources of religious teaching and belief in your answer.
- 04.5 'All religious people should be pacifists.'
Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you should:

- use reasoned arguments to support the statement
- use reasoned arguments to support a different view
- refer to religious arguments
- reach a justified conclusion

You may also refer to non-religious arguments.

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04.1 Which of the following is a weapon of mass destruction?

- ☐ A) Nuclear bomb ☐ B) Landmine ☐ C) Machine gun

04.2 Give **one** way in which religious believers express pacifist views.

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04.3 Explain **two** different beliefs in contemporary British society about religion. You should make reference to at least one religious tradition in your answer.

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04.4 Explain **two** religious teachings about holy war. Refer to Scripture or other sources of religious teaching and belief in your answer.

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- use reasoned arguments to support the statement
- use reasoned arguments to support a different view
- refer to religious arguments
- reach a justified conclusion



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Preview of Questions Ends Here

This is a limited inspection copy. Sample of questions ends here to avoid students previewing questions before they are set. See contents page for details of the rest of the resource.

Mark Scheme

04.1 Which of the following terms means bringing people back into relationship after a disagreement?

- A) Retaliation B) Forgiveness C) Reconciliation

Correct response: Reconciliation

04.2 Give one way in which religious believers might justify fighting in a just war.

Responses may include the following, but any relevant point will be accepted.

It is a just/defensive/righteous war, they are defending the weak/innocent, the religion and/or its sacred places, God commanded it, they are opposing an evil

04.3 Explain two different beliefs in contemporary British society about the use of nuclear weapons.

You should make reference to at least one religious tradition in your answer.

Responses should include reference to Christianity as the main religion in the UK.

Responses may include the following, but any relevant point will be accepted.

Most religions do not have universal agreement on contemporary social issues, when the issue was not significant at the religion's time/place of origin. Changes that have occurred since the origins of a religion can be used to disregard ideas that do not reflect contemporary values, as can virtue ethics. The desire for peace. The same teaching can be interpreted in different ways. Those that believe the words of their texts come directly from God, and so they are not subject to change. Texts that contain conflicting teachings. Traditional practices/teachings may be based on law on a given issue, and this in turn may influence teachings on the issue.

A nuclear deterrent is intended to prevent other countries from attacking the UK, the risk that the UK would respond with nuclear weapons; it is another way of showing the capacity to wage nuclear war.

Buddhism:

- Buddhism is generally opposed to violence, in both thought and action. Nuclear weapons represent violence on the largest scale. The threat of using them could itself be considered violence in Buddhism.
- The First Precept forbids killing, and is sometimes interpreted as causing harm; harm on the scale of a nuclear explosion would violate this precept.
- To function as a deterrent there would have to be circumstances in which nuclear weapons could (and would) be used, so whether or not having a nuclear deterrent depends on whether there are situations in which the use of weapons could be morally justifiable.

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Christianity:

- Christianity is generally considered to be a peace-loving religion; it recognises that sometimes the ideal of peace must be abandoned for a greater evil
- The just war theory includes a requirement to use the minimum force; a massive scale of a nuclear explosion seems likely to exceed; alternatively, it specifies a reasonable chance of success, to which the capacity for a nuclear response might contribute
- To function as a deterrent there would have to be circumstances in which nuclear weapons could (and would) be used, so whether or not having a nuclear arsenal depends on whether there are situations in which the use of weapons could be morally justifiable

Hinduism:

- Hinduism in general regards ahimsa (harmlessness) as a virtue, and the production of negative karma
- Hinduism does recognise the possibility of justified violence, but those in the Manusmriti specify proportionality and protecting the innocent; challenging to achieve with a nuclear response
- To function as a deterrent there would have to be circumstances in which nuclear weapons could (and would) be used, so whether or not having a nuclear arsenal depends on whether there are situations in which the use of weapons could be morally justifiable

Islam:

- For a war to be considered lesser jihad, and, therefore, to be an Islamic duty, many criteria; these include not putting the innocent at risk and not attacking places of worship – things which cannot be achieved if a nuclear war is fought
- Peace is the ideal in Islam, and it should be an aim of fighting to achieve it; it is argued that destruction on a nuclear scale can never result in peace, and it is argued that the threat of such destruction is an effective preservation of peace
- To function as a deterrent there would have to be circumstances in which nuclear weapons could (and would) be used, so whether or not having a nuclear arsenal depends on whether there are situations in which the use of weapons could be morally justifiable

Judaism:

- Judaism does recognise the possibility of justifiable warfare, but civilians must not be targeted and damage must be limited; nuclear weapons are not for these things to be achieved
- Peace is the ideal in Judaism, and the aim of fighting should be to achieve it; it is argued that destruction on a nuclear scale can never result in peace, and it is argued that the threat of such destruction is an effective preservation of peace
- To function as a deterrent there would have to be circumstances in which nuclear weapons could (and would) be used, so whether or not having a nuclear arsenal depends on whether there are situations in which the use of weapons could be morally justifiable

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Sikhism:

- Sikhs believe that warfare can be justified, and a righteous war cannot possibly be won; to be a righteous war requires only that necessary be used, which might be said to rule out the nuclear option
- To function as a deterrent there would have to be circumstances in which violence could (and would) be used, so whether or not having a nuclear deterrent depends on whether there are situations in which the use of weapons could be morally justifiable

04.4 Explain two religious teachings about forgiveness.

Refer to Scripture or other sources of religious teaching and belief.

Responses may include the following, but any relevant point will be accepted.

Peace is usually considered the opposite of war, and a peaceful response includes non-violence. Pacifism (belief in peace) can be absolute, which is always wrong and can never be justified, or it can be conditional, where in certain circumstances violence can be morally justified and/or the best course of action. Religious teachings about peace include reasons why it is important and ideas about how to achieve it, as well as the circumstances in which violence might be justified.

Buddhism:

- Buddhists are commonly absolute pacifists because of the First Noble Truth and because violence is always likely to be an unskillful action
- The operation of karma can be understood as a kind of cosmic justice, where everyone is subject to inevitable consequences; violence is likely to lead to more violence
- Ideas such as the Middle Way and the overall importance of reconciliation mean that Buddhists might consider violence to be justifiable for the greater good in certain circumstances

Christianity:

- Peace is important in Christianity as Christ told his followers to love their enemies (Matthew 5:40) and to forgive if they wanted to be forgiven themselves
- Many Christians are not absolute pacifists, however, and the just war theory provides a framework by which Christians can justify military action; how to deal with violence are not covered by such an approach and should be avoided
- The principle of agape means Christians should always try to do good to their enemies, as far as possible and might make moral judgements as to whether aggression or violence to achieve this is justified

Hinduism:

- Ahimsa (harmlessness) is a virtue in Hinduism and could lead to non-violence in all views
- The operation of karma can be understood as a kind of cosmic justice, where everyone is subject to inevitable consequences; violence is likely to result in more violence
- The varna system includes the kshatriya (warrior) varna, which is the duty of the warrior; in Hinduism it is part of their dharma to act violently; in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna there is no higher duty than righteous warfare for a warrior (2:31-32)

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Islam:

- Islamic teachings take a stance of conditional pacifism, with any possible form of lesser jihad
- However, Allah prefers peace, and Muslims should never be the first to fight; they must fight only in the way of Allah
- Islam means submission (to Allah's will), but its linguistic root is the Arabic word for peace and this is often used to indicate the high value placed on peace

Judaism:

- The concept of war for religion is recognised in Judaism, and Jews support a stance of absolute pacifism – so sometimes it is necessary to go to war
- Judaism does value peace as an ideal but considers it a blessing as well as something people should strive to achieve (Psalms 34:15)
- Many Jews use the Hebrew word for peace, shalom, as a greeting they wish each other

Sikhism:

- Peace is an ideal for many Sikhs, as it indicates overcoming negative emotions such as hatred
- The Adi Granth says that 'no one is my enemy... I get along with everyone who is pervading in all' (1229:14–15), suggesting that the divine presence is everywhere to support and value peaceful cooperation
- The duties of the Khalsa include resisting injustice and oppression; this duty is placed upon Sikhs; this duty is important enough to take priority over personal interests

04.5 'There are no good reasons to go to war.'

Evaluate this statement.

In your answer you should:

- use reasoned arguments to support the statement
- use reasoned arguments to support a different view
- refer to religious arguments
- reach a justified conclusion

You may also refer to non-religious arguments.

Responses may include some of the following evidence and arguments, including non-religious arguments, which will be credited:

Arguments in support of the question:

- War creates other problems and may not even solve the original problem
- Innocent people, animals and the wider environment are all negatively affected while the people in control of the war and/or with the power to end it are not harmed
- There are always other ways of solving problems if time is taken to consider other views

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Arguments in support of other views:

- If a country, people or way of life is under threat or actually being destroyed, it is unreasonable to expect people to just accept that; human nature is to fight to protect family
- Sometimes things are done which are so terrible that no one should be allowed to do and say it is none of their business; the Holocaust and World War II are an example of this
- Some religions require people to fight in defence of the religion; if a religion cannot defend themselves; a religious obligation would be judged as a failure by its members of that religion

Specific religious teachings and/or source of authority that might be

Buddhism:

- The First Precept says not to kill; it does not give exceptions to pacifists
- There are no Buddhist teachings about just wars or moral violence both the perpetrator and the victim
- Buddhists are human beings, and human beings generally fight a large enough real-world threat to life and well-being could challenge religion

Christianity:

- The just war theory specifies a good reason as one of the requirements for war to be considered justified, so clearly it is possible to have a good reason to go to war in defence or to prevent a worse atrocity, such as genocide
- Christians are required to love one another, and even to love their enemies. This may be motivated by which course of action is the most loving – this is not a remaining passive
- Jesus explicitly told his followers to 'turn the other cheek' (Matthew 5:39). If someone attacked and said that peacemakers were blessed (Matthew 5:9), they should not come to bring peace 'but a sword' (Matthew 10:34), although this is not a reference to a literal sword

Hinduism:

- One of the four varnas (classes) into which an ideal society is divided is the Kshatriya (warrior) varna, which implies a recognition that there are times when the use of force is necessary and justifiable
- Hindu Scriptures recognize the possibility of dharma yuddh (righteous war) to reestablish rules of dharma; these include not hurting unarmed people (the Ahimsa principle), and fighting fairly and not involving innocent people
- Bhagavad Gita (2.31) teaches Hindus that 'there is no greater sin than failing to fight in a righteous war'

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Islam:

- Islam is not a religion which promotes absolute pacifism; conditions of definition, hold the view that there are times when violence is necessary and justified
- The need to protect Islam, and the principle of lesser jihad (the lesser struggle) are good reasons for Muslims to fight
- The Prophet sets an example to Muslims of the best way to live, and the necessity to do so

Judaism:

- Judaism is not a religion which promotes absolute pacifism; conditions of definition, hold the view that there are times when violence is necessary and justified
- Milchemet mitzvah is a war that has been commanded by G-d, and the defence of their religion and, as the Jews believe, the land of Israel

Sikhism:

- Sikhism is not a religion which promotes absolute pacifism; conditions of definition, hold the view that there are times when violence is necessary and justified
- Sikhs are required to defend the helpless and to resist tyranny and oppression. The concept of a sant-sipahi (warrior-saint) describes the combination of devotion, Naam and righteousness, and the ability to fight for a worthy cause

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Preview of Answers Ends Here

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