

# **Religious Studies**

Advanced GCE A2 H572

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H172

## **Report on the Units**

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**January 2010**

**HX72/R/10J**

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## **Chief Examiner's Report**

It was very pleasing to read a number of outstanding scripts particularly at A2.

However, too many candidates at AS are spending too little time on part (a) questions and writing disproportionately long answers to part (b) evaluative answers. Some candidates still treat part (b) questions as if they just require more information when the aim is to discuss and analyse.

A2 candidates are advised not to leave evaluation to the end of their essays but to assess ideas as the essay develops.

# G571 Philosophy of Religion

## General Comments:

Candidates for this entered for this Unit presented a variety of often interesting responses to the questions. Most took the time to think through the implications of questions and there was evidence, in many responses, of some good philosophical understanding..

Nevertheless, there are still candidates who attempt this examination with insecure knowledge of basic philosophical concepts and terminology. Many remain unaware of the correct meaning of terms such as 'empirical', 'logical', 'refute', 'metaphysical', '*a priori*' or '*a posteriori*'. Some struggled with the fundamental skill of constructing arguments, especially in part b) of questions. A *statement* of a viewpoint is not an *argument*, and argument by assertion is inappropriate in philosophical writing. Many candidates would benefit from thinking through the implications of the descriptors in the published levels of response used for marking – these are invaluable for explaining precisely those abilities rewarded by examiners.

## Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

### 1 (a) Explain the concept of '*creatio ex nihilo*'. (25)

Most candidates understood the concept of creation from nothing, though some assumed the phrase was Greek. A variety of legitimate answers were available and made good use of by candidates. Many chose to write about the creation accounts in Genesis, though most asserted that both Genesis accounts presupposed no pre-existing material, a reading not borne out by the text. Some produced interesting accounts based on understandings of science and a minority wrote very thoughtful responses on the distinction between *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio ex deo*.

Some of the better responses synthesised their knowledge of Thomistics (*ex nihilo nihil fit*) and used Leibniz's theories to argue that there must be a first uncaused cause thereby explaining *ex nihilo*. Some who used the Babylonian creation myth didn't seem to see the *ex nihilo* term in front of them as Tiamat and Marduk created from pre-existing matter.

### 1 (b) 'Nothing comes from nothing.' Discuss. (10)

Responses covered a range of possible approaches. Some thought that all that was needed was a description of the cosmological argument, but relevance to the argument needed to be established. Some took a more theological approach, arguing that a God who did not create from nothing would be somehow diminished. Some were aware of the argument used by some modern scientists that at the sub-atomic level there are particles which apparently spring into existence without antecedent.

### 2 (a) Explain Darwinism and evolutionary theory. (25)

Some candidates chose to write just a description of evolution, while others chose to relate it to questions of faith. Either approach was entirely acceptable. Some

candidates were very knowledgeable about evolution and were able to give valuable examples, such as the finches of the Galapagos. Some however thought evolution applied only to man, while very many anachronistically attributed to Darwin theories such as the Big Bang or DNA. Those who chose to elaborate on religious questions sometimes demonstrated little knowledge of religious traditions, sometimes mistakenly claiming all Christians – and certainly Roman Catholics – are creationist literalists.

**2 (b) ‘The universe is too complex for evolutionary theory to explain it.’ Discuss. (10)**

For some candidates all that was thought necessary was a statement of the design argument, while others produced more sophisticated ideas, many noting that while the theory of evolution was concerned with organisms, other aspects of the universe might require different models of explanation. There were some very thoughtful rebuttals of some notions of intelligent design and some careful analysis of scientific theory. Some, for example, made use of the idea of irreducible complexity but many misunderstood what Michael Behe was arguing.

**3 (a) Explain the concept of ‘Ideals’ in Plato’s writings. (25)**

Plato was once again the most popular question and was often answered with understanding. Most candidates chose to illustrate their answers with an account of the Simile of the Cave. There was no requirement to do so, but better responses were often able to use the Cave to develop concepts. Some accounts were fanciful – this is a topic that benefits from close study of the original text. More able answers did not merely relate the relationship of the Forms to the particulars in the world, but were able to explain their implications for education, invention and the moral life.

**3 (b) ‘Ideals are an illusion; we can only experience what is real.’ Discuss. (10)**

Most responses made the relatively obvious point about the absence of empirical evidence for the Forms, though some candidates attempted robust defence of Plato’s views. A few produced quite comprehensive accounts; the best often drawing on Aristotle’s detailed objections in *Nicomachean Ethics* I. vi. and elsewhere in his work.

There were some excellent answers from students who used Locke’s *tabula rasa* and sense experience and related that to seeing as and believing in rather than a blanket illusion.

**4 (a) Explain Mill’s challenge to the Teleological Argument. (25)**

Most candidates were aware that Mill’s challenge referred to evil, though a substantial minority simply attributed the views of Hume or objections from Darwinism to Mill. Better answers demonstrated an understanding that the question demanded *explanation* and not simply description of Mill’s position to bring out the force of the objection and what it meant for the understanding of God and nature. Some candidates demonstrated useful knowledge of Mill’s comments on the apparent crimes of nature.

**4 (b) Evaluate the claim that the universe has too many flaws for it to be designed. (10)**

Few failed to understand the thrust of the question, though some simply stated the claim rather than evaluating it. Some made good use of traditional theodicies in constructing arguments, while others chose to emphasise the inscrutability of God's purposes. Better candidates did reach a judgment, even if a provisional one, though some resorted just to statements of belief or non-belief.

## G572 Religious Ethics

### General Comments:

Overall the performance of the candidates was varied. There was a good range of answers, although some were very general, whilst others demonstrated understanding of the full demands of the questions. Generally candidates seemed to be well prepared and tried hard to use technical terms. However, having said this, many weaker candidates found this unit challenging in as much as they lacked a thorough knowledge of certain areas of the specification. The questions required candidates to know, understand and be able to apply information. Higher level responses, which really engaged with the question, showed that it was possible to earn the full range of marks.

Some candidates did not show their knowledge clearly in part (a) but were able to develop ideas in part (b). Knowledge was often implicit, and concepts not explained or applied properly, and appropriate examples not given. Some candidates spent a considerable amount of the time on part (b), but in doing so lost out on marks in part (a).

However, candidates must learn how to apply ethical theories to practical ethical issues. Many candidates do not know how to do so and therefore cannot access the higher marks.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

**1 (a) Explain what is meant by moral absolutism. (25)**

This question was a popular question and was answered satisfactorily by many. Most of the candidates were able to approach this question with some understanding but some were unable to follow through and demonstrate the full depth the question required.

There were a few who were confused over the technical terms: mixing up deontological with teleological.

Many used either Natural Law, or Kant, or both to support their answers and many contrasted absolutism with relativism.

**1 (b) 'Moral absolutism cannot be justified.' Discuss. (10)**

This question elicited some very good discussions of what was meant by not being justified and who would perceive absolute ethics as unjustified.

Many just agreed with the statement using the perennial examples of the starving child or lying to a homicidal maniac or the Nazis.

Others were able to show some support to moral absolutism, discussing the need for some absolute moral laws and the inability of those who simply chose relativism to object to anything others do.

There was also good discussion of the failure of absolute ethics to take account of differing situations and motives.

**2 (a) Explain how Utilitarians approach the issues of war. (25)**

This was the most frequently answered question but the least well answered, as candidates often failed to mention war until the last paragraph and only wrote about Utilitarianism. Many responses to this were basic - some could only apply Bentham and Mill omitting Preference Utilitarianism altogether. Others just referred to the general happiness principle - many confusing Bentham's pleasure and Mill's happiness. The hedonic calculus was referred to but only briefly - very few tried to apply the principles to the issues of war - perhaps because they couldn't remember the principles or because they were unable to.

Some responses did specifically go into the issues of war but many just referred to the happiness over winning against the pain of people being killed. Examples of the World Wars and Hiroshima were used - some candidates were unable to distinguish between Iraq and Afghanistan. Many stated that Utilitarianism would look to the Just War Theory, and there were a few good responses linking the two approaches.

In general candidates showed good knowledge of Utilitarianism but most of the comments on war were weak as candidates did not use specific examples to support their case.

This question was a good example of where candidates (in general) are not applying ethical theories to practical ethical situations.

**2 (b) 'Pacifism causes more harm than good.' Discuss. (10)**

Very few candidates were able to grasp the depth this question required. Many answers were superficial - many at GCSE level referring to Jesus as a pacifist. One candidate attributed Gandhi's comment "eye for an eye ... world will soon be blind" to Jesus.

Good answers recognised that this question implied Anscombe's approach and gave detailed discussions of different types of pacifism. There were a few excellent responses which considered the change of view of Bonhoeffer when faced with an implacable enemy.

A small minority referred to Christian war realism.

**3 (a) Explain the strengths of Natural Law theory. (25)**

This was the most popular question with most candidates being able to address the strengths and there were some very good/excellent responses.

Candidates were able to discuss the strengths of its origins in Aristotle, the idea of purpose, the universal nature of the Primary Precepts, the flexibility allowed by the Secondary Precepts, real and apparent goods and even the doctrine of double effect. Some gave good examples to illustrate their answers. Candidates in general were able to see the positive in Natural Law.

Weaker responses gave an account of Natural Law and tagged on a few strengths at the end.

Other candidates could not resist the urge to extend the question and point out the weaknesses of Natural Law in today's world.

**3 (b) To what extent could a follower of Natural Law accept embryo research? (10)**

This question elicited two approaches: one where the candidates looked specifically at the way Natural Law would or would not accept embryo research; the other was to compare and contrast Natural Law with other ethical theories or even other religions.

There were, however, some good discussions applying the Primary Precepts and showing that even if it may make for a more harmonious society or even improve human life, the loss of embryos would forbid it to a follower of Natural Law as embryo research not only failed to protect innocent life, but it failed to honour God's creation.

Some candidates focussed on IVF issues; some were unsure what embryo research was and one or two even felt the embryo could be put back into the womb afterwards.

**4 (a) Explain how the ethics of the religion you have studied might be applied to abortion. (25)**

This was the most popular question and generally the least well done.

Whereas most candidates addressed this through Christian Ethics (not usually very well) many candidates put in as many ethical theories as they could do without showing how they related to Christian Ethics.

Kant and Utilitarianism were often referred to both directly and indirectly as examples of Christian Ethics. Candidates found it hard to focus on the issues of abortion - although some did mention personhood and the Sanctity of Life - it was usually addressed in a GCSE manner.

There were a few very good responses that approached the question from the viewpoint of Jewish or Muslim ethical teaching.

**4 (b) 'Religious ethics fail to consider consequences.' Discuss. (10)**

This question again elicited two approaches: the first carried on from part (a) discussing Christian Ethics, whereas others seemed to think that the question referred to the scope of normative ethics they had studied so Kant was often used. There were a few good answers referring to Fletcher and agape and the secondary precepts of Natural Law as a more teleological approach than the Divine Command Theory.

One or two stated that because God had instigated the commands then he had already considered the consequences; whilst others believed that through following the commands it paved a way to heaven and this was a consequence in itself.

## G573 Jewish Scriptures

### General Comments:

Rubric infringements were rare and most candidates managed to complete the paper within the time limit. Most candidates addressed the questions according to the two assessment objectives but there are still some candidates who seem to think that they have to debate the (a) parts of the questions. The main weakness was a tendency to regurgitate lesson notes without due regard to engaging with the wording of the questions. Many relied on story telling and general knowledge. There were, however, some excellent responses which quoted the set texts appropriately, made reference to issues of date, authorship, purpose and historicity when relevant and were a pleasure to read.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

**1 (a) Explain the differences between the covenants G-d made with Moses and with Jeremiah. (25)**

Some candidates began with covenant definitions and information about the covenant with Moses and then gave some account of the one with Jeremiah before tackling the differences. Other candidates addressed the differences between the covenants from the very start and continued to do so throughout the response. Both approaches were equally capable of achieving high marks especially if the candidates took the opportunity to demonstrate familiarity with the actual textual material.

Exodus 19-24 is the set text in the specification for the covenant with Moses but candidates were free to concentrate on the Decalogue rather than the whole Mosaic Covenant. Some candidates distinguished between apodictic laws and casuistic laws and referred back to previous covenants including the Noahide laws and the original commission to humankind in the story of the 'covenant' with Adam. The ratification of the promise to Abraham and explanations of the role accepted by the Jewish nation at Sinai featured in most responses. This course is open to candidates of any religious persuasion or none and the variety of equally acceptable approaches in the exegesis of Jeremiah 31 demonstrated this. The main weakness was that in their explanations some candidates did not refer to the actual text.

Some candidates even seemed to be unaware that Jeremiah's prophecy refers to the Mosaic covenant. Competent essays attempting to address the question tended to include an explanation of the original Jewish context of Jeremiah's fresh prophetic insights and to place verses 31-34 within the larger prophecy of the whole chapter. For differences some candidates concentrated on the idea of personal responsibility for sins as opposed to corporate responsibility. Others explained that Jeremiah's own experience made him aware of the potential of the covenant relationship of the individual with G-d but only a few quoted anything about the Torah being written in future days on the heart. A few candidates gave both the Jewish and the Christian interpretation of Jeremiah 31 but this was not essential for full marks.

**1 (b) 'The covenants with Moses and Jeremiah have nothing in common.'**  
**Discuss. (10)**

Discussions tended to develop points made in the first part of the question but inaccurate knowledge and limited understanding of the texts invalidated some of the cases being made. Many candidates in their discussions criticised the labelling of Jeremiah's covenant as 'new'. Some, however, only managed to betray the fact that they themselves did not know that Jeremiah himself refers to the new covenant in the text. Others acknowledged the title, quoting the salient verses, then argued coherently that in many ways it was the same old covenant but this time G-d would provide the means for people to keep the laws by inscribing it on people's hearts.

Some candidates tried to balance the fact that the new covenant is said to concentrate on personal as opposed to corporate religion but also the context foresees a restoration of land and a reunited Israel and Judah. Many took this to be a reference to the Messianic Age of righteousness or some scenario of the End Times.

Other candidates argued that the Jeremiah covenant presupposes the continuation of previous covenants rather than intending to supersede them and that all covenants have essential common factors as part of the master plan of G-d.

**2 (a) Explain the role of the non-Jews in the Book of Jonah. (25)**

Inevitably there was much story telling but relevant material gained credit. Both the sailors and the Ninevites featured as non-Jews in the responses, though not necessarily in equal proportions in the explanations. The Jewish tradition paralleling the King of Nineveh with the Pharaoh of Egypt at the Exodus was accepted though it was not essential. Many comprehensive accounts read like teachers' notes rather than responses addressing the question. A surprising number of candidates forgot the 'miraculous' plant, the kikayon, or did not appreciate the relevance of the incident. Many candidates, however, showed understanding that the gentiles are the catalysts not only for the sequence of events in the story but also serve to spur Jonah's realisation about the nature and character of the universal G-d and the role of Israel in the world.

**2 (b) To what extent is the relationship of Jonah with the non-Jews the main theme of the book? (10)**

Candidates were given the opportunity to develop the information they provided in the first part of the question as evidence to illustrate the importance of the gentiles to the plot and to the teaching of the book. The issue for debate was the extent to which this important theme is the main one in the book.

The specification includes both the book of Jonah and the book of Job under the theme of G-d and suffering. Jonah has the topics of obedience, the inability to hide from G-d or to resist G-d's wishes alongside the theme of the relationship with non-Jews so candidates might have discussed the relative weight of any of these factors as main themes. Any feasible lessons Jonah came to realise about his own preconceptions about justice and mercy and the character of G-d would also have been acceptable.

Some candidates advanced a variety of acceptable theories about the purpose of the author and the historical context in which the book might have been

written and some discussed the relative importance of all the themes but the majority treated the question as if it required a GCSE response. They opted for yes it was the main theme or no it wasn't, gave a reason, anticipated or gave a bit of evidence for the opposing point of view and concluded by reiterating their stance.

**3 (a) Explain the significance of Abraham for understanding the historical background of the Jewish Scriptures. (25)**

Candidates are expected to be familiar with a simple timeline approximation of when Abraham lived (about 2,000 BCE). Candidates are free to use the traditional Jewish dates by which Abraham lived for 175 years from 1948 to 2123 after creation.

Most understood the significance of Abraham even to the present day as the Patriarchal founder of Judaism, both as a race and as a religion. Most could give an account of G-d's covenants with him including the promise of a land and the institution of male circumcision. A few commented that the story from then on is rooted in or related to real history rather than myth, legend and folklore so geographical, literary and archaeological evidence can be employed. More significantly, all the Jewish Scriptures ever since, including the set texts, have had Abraham, implicitly or explicitly, as one of their key terms of reference.

**3 (b) How far does it matter whether or not the Abraham stories are history or myth? (10)**

Some candidates treated the question as if it simply asked if the stories were true or not. Others began by defining the purpose of and the difference between history and myth as types of written and oral literature. One or two considered the extent to which sagas of patriarchs might reflect Semitic tribal movements. Some argued that the details of the stories were very realistic whilst others maintained that Abraham was the archetype of the righteous man showing obedience and faith. Considering to whom it might 'matter' produced lively discussions including the idea that the long history of Judaism provides enough validation for the faith without consideration of the historicity of the origins. Most eventually concluded that ultimately it didn't matter because whether history or myth all Scriptures are revealed literature.

**4 (a) Explain the significant features of the incident involving Elijah and Naboth's vineyard. (25)**

Very few candidates who chose this option possibly because this a new topic in the revised specification. More story telling than analysis was present. Most knew that Elijah lived under the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. Some managed to place the historical context as ninth century BCE in the northern kingdom, Israel, of which the capital was Samaria. They explained that Ahab had a palace in Jezreel further north that was next to Naboth's vineyard which Ahab coveted. Most candidates told how Jezebel set up the murder of Naboth and how Ahab went to the vineyard but was denounced by Elijah. Only a few candidates commented on the fact that Jezebel was a Phoenician and, besides encouraging Baal worship and syncretism, she had ideas about kingship which did not fit the Hebrew ideal. A few responses explained that indirectly all the characters in the story were to blame for the death of Naboth. The culpability of the elders and officials, the two unscrupulous witnesses and the gullible crowd suggest that Israelite society was becoming more corrupt and more like the neighbouring countries now that it was split from the southern kingdom, Judah.

**4 (b) To what extent does the vineyard incident show a development in Elijah's view of the role of a prophet? (10)**

Some candidates started with a definition of the role of a prophet e.g. foretelling and forthtelling as spokesman for G-d. A few wrote that the prophets of Israel and Judah never forgot their nomadic past and their covenant commitment and were always having to meet the challenges of living in a settled agricultural environment among other nations who worshipped fertility gods. At Mount Carmel, Elijah had proved the G-d of Israel to be the controller of nature and more powerful than the Canaanite Baalim and Ashtaroth, including Jezebel's Phoenician Baal, Melkart.

Only one or two discussions included reference to Mount Horeb (Sinai) where G-d was not in the wind, earthquake and fire but in the still small voice of conscience. This was suggested as the development in Elijah's perception which would pave the way for future prophets and their social conscience.

## G574 New Testament

### General Comments:

The overall performance showed that the majority of candidates understood how to meet the assessment objectives for both parts (a) and (b) of the questions and produced a consistent level of answer, in both parts of the chosen question(s), which was in line with their ability. However, there were also some candidates whose performance was uneven and they paid little attention to achieving a balanced argument in part (b).

Question 4 was the least popular question but the candidates who chose to answer question 4 did so confidently, showing a good understanding of the subject matter.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

- 1 (a) Explain the religious ideas of the Pharisees and their influence on Jewish life. [25]**

This was a popular question. Most answers were factual and covered the religious ideas of the Pharisees in some detail and gave examples of their rituals and practice but in general the understanding of their influence on Jewish life was less sure and some candidates were confused about this issue. In some cases, it appeared that candidates were trying to combine the views of a number of sources into one cohesive view when it would have been better to point out the ambiguities in the different portrayals of the Pharisees and attribute them to their sources. Some weaker answers confused Pharisees with other groups but they were still able to gain credit for the overarching characteristics of religious and political ideas prevalent in all Jewish groups at the time.

- 1 (b) 'Jesus died because he opposed Jewish religious ideas'. Discuss. [10]**

There were some well argued answers to this question and some candidates provided evidence to support their views from Mark 11, as well as giving more general information about Jesus' conflict with the religious authorities. The political as well as the religious factors were also well known. The best answers offered a balance of views and several examined Jesus' death as a necessary prerequisite of his divine destiny. A small number of candidates made only a basic attempt to sustain an argument or justify their views.

- 2 (a) Explain the meaning of the Last Supper in the New Testament. [25]**

This was another popular question but on the whole the performance was disappointing. The set texts are Mark 14:12-25, Luke 22:7-23 and 1 Corinthians.11:17-26. In some cases candidates wrote about John's version of the Last Supper. A fair number of candidates explained the well rehearsed arguments about whether the Last Supper was a Passover meal to the exclusion of any other information. Some answers explained only the memorial meal and the words of institution and their relevance to the Eucharist today, ignoring the preparations, the prediction of betrayal and the references to the Kingdom in all three texts.

There were some comprehensive and thoughtful answers but others contained too much material that should have been included in the answer to (b) and also gave misinformation about John's account.

**2 (b) 'The Last Supper was not a Passover meal.' Discuss. [10]**

The most common error here was to confuse or make wrong assumptions about the theological motives of the gospel writers in their portrayal of the Last Supper. Some candidates appeared to be constructing arguments from information that they had misunderstood or which they interpreted vaguely.

The majority of answers assumed that the arguments for and against the statement are clear cut and only the best answers came to the conclusion that the evidence is inconclusive.

**3 (a) Explain how Mark's account of the crucifixion shows Jesus to be both human and the Son of God. [25]**

In answering this question some candidates wrote about the Passion narrative as a whole or began with the event of Jesus at prayer in Gethsemane rather than concentrating on the crucifixion. These answers had relevance but the responses which gained the better marks focussed on Mark 15:21-44.

Some very good answers explained the content and structure of Mark's account of the crucifixion and the possible reasons for his presentation of the events in a particular way to show the agony and despair of Jesus and the dramatic, revelatory nature of his death. Surprisingly, a number of candidates appeared to have only an incomplete and sketchy understanding of the details of the crucifixion in Mark. Some confused Mark's account with that of John, which is not on the specification.

**3 (b) 'Mark's account of the death of Jesus is not concerned with historical accuracy.' Discuss. [10]**

Some of the good attempts to answer this question offered arguments, with evidence from the gospel, about Mark's motives in writing his gospel. In most answers, the issue of the genre of gospel writing and historical writing in the first century was discussed. Some answers gave only very general arguments along these lines and the loss of focus on the death of Jesus meant that they were not strictly answering the question. Others did concentrate on Mark's presentation of the death of Jesus and achieved a higher level of performance because their arguments had more structure and addressed the question.

**4 (a) Explain the issues concerning the long and short ending of Mark's Gospel. [25]**

Too few candidates answered this question to make a general report on the performance but there were some good attempts to get to grips with the question and present interesting arguments in part (b).

**4 (b) The Resurrection is as important in Mark as in the other gospels. [10]**  
See above

## G575 Developments in Christian Theology

### General Comments:

It was good to see how some candidates were able to apply their knowledge of the whole unit to either parts of this unit. The weakest answers were to question 4 on the hermeneutical circle as it is employed in liberation theology. In general there were some good answers and candidates showed how this unit can be answered in a variety of different ways.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

- 1 (a) **Explain Aquinas' teaching on God's relationship to angels and humans. (25)**

This was a popular question but too many answers gave lengthy introductions on Aristotle or Aquinas and the Five Ways and missed the focus of the question. Better answers described God's relationship with angels and then went on to describe how humans differed. Some very good answers explained the key idea of a hierarchy being/ casual nexus and the function of angels as intermediary beings rather than messengers.

- 1 (b) **'Belief in angels is irrational.' Discuss. (10)**

There were some thoughtful and well-considered responses to this question. Many addressed the mythological character of Old Testament and New Testament texts and concurred with Bultmann that one shouldn't believe in such figures but view them as existential expressions of the human condition. A few very good answers challenged Aquinas' view of angels in relationship to Christian theology and wondered whether their existence challenged the Trinity and incarnation. Weaker answers tended to offer the view that as the Bible refers to angels it follows that it is rational to believe in them whether this is reasonable or not.

- 2 (a) **Explain Cone's teaching on Jesus as saviour. (25)**

There were quite a few good answers here which understood Cone's Christology to be challenging the liberal claim that we can only really know about the Christ of faith. They explained that 'blackness' expresses the historical context of Jesus as God and man against oppression. However a few candidates gave lengthy historical introductions about slavery and the civil rights movement which gave very little time to address the question. Some only considered ideas of the 'black Christ' and Jesus siding with the oppressed rather than the wider Christological question.

- 2 (b) **To what extent is Cone's view of Jesus is too political? (10)**

Few candidates grasped the thrust of this question. Some talked about the politics of the civil rights movement but better candidates pointed out the political role of Jesus in challenging the social and political structures of his day and contrasted this with New Testament evidence pointing to a non-political and radically pacifist role.

**3 (a) Explain the organisation and purpose of base communities. (25)**

Most candidates were able to provide a sketch of the origins and role of Base Communities - although weaker candidates only focussed on the formation of Base Communities rather than their actual functioning and theological aims. Better candidates were able to give examples and show how the three mediations were used within Base Communities to effect real change.

**3 (b) Assess the view that base communities pose a real threat to the Church. (10)**

Many argued that Base Communities supported the role of the Church, although quite a few were able to contrast this with the idea that they were too Marxist for official recognition by the Catholic Church. Better candidates were able to point out how Base Communities challenged the nature of priesthood and the Church's grip over its congregations. A few very good candidates discussed the 'protestant' nature of these communities and the reason why the Catholic Church might have reacted as it did (and does).

**4 (a) Explain how the idea of the hermeneutical circle is used in liberation theology. (25)**

Some candidates knew about Schleiermacher's hermeneutical circle but rather confusingly associated this with all three mediations. Others gave long introductions about the origins of liberation theology and Marxism without much explanation of the hermeneutical circle as such. Better candidates were able to discuss the aims of the second mediation, but oddly almost no one referred to biblical texts and how these might be utilised in the process of conscientisation.

**4 (b) 'Theology should be done by experts not ordinary people.' Discuss. (10)**

There was some confusion as to what theology is and who the experts are. Good candidates who knew about the role of the theologian in the Base Communities suggested that the expert's role is to ensure that interpretation of texts isn't entirely subjective. Others argued that Base Communities were prime examples of how theology was practical and not the preserve of experts. Many argued that there is no reason why the Bible cannot be read by any one. A few analysed the eisegesis/exegesis relationship (but this is an area which needs more critical understanding).

## G576 Buddhism

### General Comments:

Most candidates were able to demonstrate a reasonable knowledge of Buddhism. They also, generally, knew what skills were being looked for in part (a) and part (b) questions. There were a few rubric errors – mainly through candidates only answering one question, though one candidate did answer three questions.

In general, however, there was a tendency for candidates to answer the question they had wanted rather than the question they had been asked, particularly in questions 1 and 4. Centres may wish to use a range of different questions on each topic for exam practice to try and avoid candidates writing responses with a 'prepared' answer in mind. Centres may also wish to advise candidates of techniques to help them spot key terms in questions in order to help them focus their answers more precisely.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question

No.

**1 (a) Explain the origins of the monastic sangha. (25)**

This was a popular question, however almost all the answers ignored the focus of the question. Most candidates appeared to write everything they knew about the relationship between the laity and the sangha, or the vinaya rules. In some cases any content about the origins of the sangha appeared to be accidental rather than deliberate.

There were however some very good responses. These tended to explore the itinerant lifestyles of the Buddha and the early Buddhists, the development of more settled communities as numbers increased, and the targeted use of some accounts of the origins of specific vinaya rules. Some candidates also made good reference to the role of Asoka in formalising the monastic communities.

**1 (b) 'The monastic lifestyle is more suited to men than women.' Discuss. (10)**

Most candidates were able to construct an argument in response to this question, mostly agreeing with the statement. Candidates tended to focus on the difficulty women would have shaving their heads, caring for children, and being safe whilst living itinerant lifestyles. A significant number of candidates made sexist comments without providing any justifications for them.

The best responses tended to explore the Buddha's initial reluctance to ordain women, and yet his final decision to do so. They were also more aware of issues surrounding cultural acceptance of women, and the lack of support from the laity in some areas.

**2 (a) Explain the relationship between kamma and nibbana. (25)**

This was a very popular question. The majority of candidates were able to write a detailed description of kamma, but far fewer wrote about nibbana. Often a detailed description of kamma was followed by a sentence in the conclusion stating that kamma affects nibbana. As with other questions candidates missed the focus of the question, and few candidates explored the link between kamma and nibbana in any depth.

A significant number of candidates wrote about kamma from a Hindu rather than a Buddhist perspective, missing the focus on intention within Buddhism. A small number of candidates wrote at length about the TV programme 'My Name is Earl', which did not necessarily aid their understanding of the Buddhist concept of kamma.

**2 (b) To what extent does belief in kamma force Buddhists to behave morally? (10)**

This question was generally answered to a satisfactory level. Answers were generally focused on the question, though candidates appeared to lack depth of knowledge and often seemed to run out of things to say.

The majority of candidates argued that kamma did offer an incentive to behave morally through reward and punishment, but that true Buddhists would not need this incentive as they should not be attached to kamma.

Some candidates used their knowledge of free-will and determinism to great effect in discussing whether kamma could in fact force Buddhists to behave or not.

**3 (a) Explain how the Tibetan wheel of life illustrates the cycle of dependent origination. (25)**

This was the most unpopular question on the paper. Most of those who attempted it gave descriptions of the wheel focusing on the three poisons or the six realms of rebirth. Very few even mentioned the twelve links of dependent origination, and even fewer showed a clear knowledge of the concept of dependent origination.

Most responses focused on kamma, and tried to show how kamma was illustrated in the realms of rebirth.

**3 (b) 'Dependent origination is too complicated for most Buddhists to understand.' Discuss. (10)**

Answers to this question were often simplistic, perhaps reflecting a lack of knowledge of the specifics of dependent origination. Most candidates argued that dependent origination was hard to understand, but that Buddhists should understand it because it was their religion. Some candidates implied that Buddhist monks should make more effort to understand dependent origination because they followed the teachings at a higher level.

**4 (a) Explain how Buddhists might follow the Four Noble Truths. (25)**

This was a popular question, but again candidates tended to ignore the focus of the question on following the Four Noble Truths. Many candidates were able to give detailed description of each individual truth, for example discussing the different types of dukkha. Few however mentioned specific ways of following the truths, and those who did often listed these in simplistic ways such as avoiding being a butcher.

The answers were often theoretical, showing little understanding of what the truths might mean to a practising Buddhist.

The best responses often spent less time in detailed description of each truth, but made a real attempt to consider how the teachings could be followed. Some explored practical activities, such as the livelihood which might be followed. Other considered how studying scripture or meditation could lead to a fuller understanding of the truths, and thus a greater ability to apply them in daily life.

**4 (b) To what extent is the third noble truth more important in determining Buddhist behaviour than the other three? (10)**

This question drew a large number of responses which appeared to be pre-prepared answers to a different question. Most candidates appeared to write answers addressing which noble truth was most important, with little reference to the 'in determining Buddhist behaviour' aspect of the question.

Many candidates argued that all were equally important or the Buddha would not have taught them together. The second most popular argument seemed to be that first three were more important than the fourth truth as they were the explanation which led Buddhists to true knowledge.

Those who addressed the question more specifically often argued that the fourth truth was more important, since it contained specific guidance on behaviour. They were however able to explore whether we would act on this guidance if we did not realise there was dukkha, or if we had not been assured that following this guidance would prevent dukkha.

## **G577 Hinduism**

**General Comments:**

There were insufficient candidates entered to allow meaningful comment to be prepared.

## G578 Islam

### General Comments:

Questions 2 and 4 were the most popular. Unfortunately there were some candidates who seemed to misunderstand the rubric and only answered two subsections of the questions rather than two whole questions.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

**1 (a) Explain the importance of the teachings in Surah 96 for Muslims. (25)**

Question 1 evoked some of the best responses and also some of the worst. Many candidates quoted the beginning of this set passage and identified the first five verses of Surah 96 as the initial command from Jibrail to Muhammad ﷺ to 'proclaim in the name of thy Lord....'. Some credit was given for accounts of the incident in the cave on Mount Nur. In explaining the importance of the teachings for Muslims, most candidates pointed out that the message revealed to Muhammad ﷺ centres on Allah the Creator and that this monotheistic belief is the very heart of Islam.

Only a few candidates, however, demonstrated knowledge of the whole of Surah 96 and they were the ones who tended to produce excellent responses. There were some candidates who confused Surah 96 with Surah 1.

**1 (b) 'Surah 96 would make a good introduction to the study of Islam.' Discuss. (10)**

Most candidates managed to present reasoned arguments in response to the stimulus. A few invalidated part of their case, however, by giving, as evidence, the position of Surah 96 in the Qur'an. It became clear that they thought it was at the start of the Qur'an and entitled 'Al-Fatihah'.

Some argued in favour of the real Al-Fatihah – Surah 1, which is also a set text, as a better introduction on the grounds that the compilers were inspired to use it as 'the opening'. They used the opportunity to quote Surah 1 and some compared the contents with Surah 96 to discuss how far either or both are a synopsis of the message of the Qur'an.

A few candidates argued, fairly convincingly, that a study of Islam needs geography and an introduction about pre-Islamic Arabia before studying any text.

**2 (a) Explain the theological significance of the shahadah. [25]**

The word 'theological' provided some differentiation. Many answered the question they wanted to see – 'Explain the significance of the shahadah for Muslims.' Most candidates were able to identify the shahadah as the First Pillar of Islam. Many also gave details of the usage e.g. the shahadah and the adhan are the first and last words a Muslim hears and the declaration before witnesses is sufficient to admit a person as a revert to Islam. There were some good explanations of the credal function of the shahadah and the monotheistic beliefs it contains, particularly from those who addressed the theological significance.

They tended to cover tawhid as a key concept, as well as the importance of avoiding shirk. Then they made a point of explaining the role and status of Muhammad ﷺ.

**2 (b) 'The shahadah is the most important of the five pillars of Islam.' Discuss. [10]**

Many responses read like GCSE essays but candidates did manage to address the topic and present their arguments quite well except for those who could not identify or were confused about the Five Pillars: shahadah, salah, zakah, sawm and hajj.

Most candidates argued in favour of one or more individual Pillars as important to the spiritual growth of individual Muslims as well as to the unity of Ummah, locally and worldwide.

Some candidates commented that the Five Pillars are interlinked practices which support the whole religion but only a few discussions demonstrated any real sense of the profound way the first pillar links with the others.

**3 (a) Explain the process by which the Surahs were collected and the Qur'an compiled. [25]**

Some candidates spent too long on the experiences of Muhammad ﷺ and too little on the process of compilation. Most included the learning by rote by followers and the writing on scraps of paper, leather, bone and pottery.

Some accounts included the collection being overseen by Muhammad ﷺ and kept in Hafsa's chest. In 631 CE Muhammad ﷺ sorted the revelations into Surahs (some by date and some by theme) but died before the 114 were sorted into chronological order. Variations on this information were accepted and some weaker candidates finished at this point.

Others continued explaining the process of compilation with Zayd ibn Thabit by order of Abu Bakr compiling the official version of the Qur'an and on through the history to Uthman eventually organising the Qur'an in order of length except Surah 1.

**3 (b) 'Islam could not exist without the Qur'an.' Discuss. [10]**

There were some interesting and varied discussions. Some argued on historical grounds, for example, that Islam would never have begun without the revelation to Muhammad ﷺ and Islam could not have survived and spread without the Qur'an. Some considered the role the Qur'an continues to play in all aspects of Muslim life. Markers accepted 'would not' as well as 'could not'. One or two candidates actually made that distinction in their discussions.

Some candidates demonstrated philosophical insight about the extent to which the revealed words of Allah are and need to be essentially part of Islam or of any other faith. Some referred to the existence of earlier corrupted versions of the revelation to argue for the essential role of the final revelation of the Qur'an in the destiny of humankind. Some responses included the fact that Muslims believe there is a heavenly archetypal version, 'the mother of the book'.

**4 (a) Explain the significance of Salat-ul-Jumu'ah for the Muslim community. [25]**

Some candidates began with a general introduction about salah as a Pillar of Islam and others launched straight into a description of Friday prayers, when Muslims gather for Zuhr prayers and the Imam leads the congregation in the first two rakahs and preaches the khutbah. Some candidates knew that The Day of Assembly is done in obedience to the command of Allah in the Qur'an (62:9-10).

A number of candidates, sensibly, thought to explain that Friday is not a day of rest; and normal work and business carry on as usual before and after the time of prayer.

Most candidates concentrated on the ways Salat-ul-Jumu'ah strengthens Ummah and the Imam's sermon usually featured in the responses as a key factor for a variety of spiritual and practical reasons.

**4 (b) 'All true Muslims should go to Friday prayers at the mosque.' Discuss. [10]**

Many candidates knew that, though some women and children do attend, it is not compulsory for women to attend Friday prayers but they will perform the noon prayer at home.

Some candidates based their views on the fact that prayers can be said anywhere as long as the place is clean and permission is given to shorten prayers when travelling and when in danger. Prayers also can be combined as Muhammad ﷺ did.

In their responses some tried to balance the argument with the fact that attendance is not only for worship – it builds up community spirit, as shown in the first part of the question.

Some candidates addressed the word 'all' and considered the situation of Muslims at work or school in non-Muslim countries. Others explored the idea of a 'true' Muslim and tended to comment on the importance of niyyah, intention, in Islam.

## G579 Judaism

### General Comments:

Overall, candidates were able to demonstrate sound factual knowledge of the topics and many used this knowledge to good effect in writing well-developed explanations and arguments to their chosen questions. Several scripts were outstanding, securing either full marks or close to full marks.

Candidates who produced weaker responses often failed to select relevant material and did not maintain a strong focus on the question. This was particularly evident in question 1 where it was clear that candidates had not revised the full specification content for the topic. It must be emphasised that questions may be drawn from any part of the specification content.

There were no common misinterpretations of the rubric, although the examiners were concerned that several candidates did not attempt the two questions required by the paper. Once again, a number of candidates spent far too long on their first question with the inevitable result that they left themselves scoring less well on the second.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

- 1 (a) **Explain the principal differences between the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. (25)**

Answers to (a) were disappointing. Although most candidates were able to demonstrate that the Jerusalem and Palestinian Talmuds were the product of two distinct centres of learning, few showed knowledge of dissimilarities in subject matter, method, presentation, and language. Some wrongly supposed that both Gemaras constitute a commentary on the entire Mishnah.

- 1 (b) **'Something written by humans cannot be the word of G-d.' Discuss. (10)**

Answers to (b) were varied. Most candidates considered the idea that the rabbis who wrote the text of the Talmud were men inspired by G-d to do so, and therefore the text has divine authority. Some went further, accepting that the rabbis in every generation are people of faith and learning, and are therefore able to enunciate the truths of G-d.

- 2 (a) **Explain the importance for Jews of observing the Sabbath as separate from the rest of the week. (25)**

This was a popular question. Unhappily, many candidates focused on description and displayed only limited understanding of why the Sabbath is different and set aside from the other days. Even so, there were some excellent responses, including useful discussion of the Sabbath as a memorial to the creation of the world, and as a memorial to the exodus from Egypt. Several candidates identified the Sabbath as Sunday, which was worrying.

- 2 (b) **'Celebrating the ending of the Sabbath is as important as celebrating its beginning.'** Discuss. (10)

Most agreed with the statement in (b), nearly all pointing out that the whole of Sabbath is designated a holy day. Some candidates included useful discussion of how the Havdalah ceremony connects the Sabbath with the rest of the week.

- 3 (a) **Explain what is meant by halakhah. (25)**

On the whole, candidates made a good attempt at answering this question. Most began by outlining the etymology of the word, halakhah, and its derivative significance as a 'way of life', before proceeding to discuss the importance of halakhah as a living tradition, prescribing action, binding and authoritative. Some made good reference to influential halakhic codes, notably the Shulhan Arukh. Several included useful discussion of Progressive Judaism's stance with regard to halakhah's edicts.

- 3 (b) **'A truly Jewish life is lived by loving G-d, not observing mitzvot.'** Discuss. (10)

The majority opinion in (b) was that Jews can only truly love G-d by living according to the mitzvot. Many were aware that not all of the mitzvot can be carried out today, but few discussed the implications of this.

- 4 (a) **Explain the importance of the Yom Tovim. (25)**

There were many good answers. Most candidates began their response by explaining the characteristics of a yom tov, before going on to discuss the Yom Tovim in general. Candidates tended to explain how each of the three Pilgrim festivals has a historical, a spiritual and an agricultural significance, while the High Holy Days emphasise the awesome demands of G-d.

- 4 (b) **'To what extent are the festivals in the Torah more important than the Rabbinic festivals?' (10)** Answers to (b) were varied. Most supposed that the biblical festivals and fasts were more important than the Rabbinic festivals insofar as they were commanded by G-d. Others maintained that modern festivals such as Yom Hashoah are of more relevance to modern Judaism. Some highlighted the popularity of Chanukah and Purim with children and the important educational aspects of the festivals.

# G581 Philosophy of Religion

## General Comments:

Responses to this paper varied from excellent to very poor. Many of the scripts were felt by examiners to be average, although there were some centres which were clearly very well prepared. Some answers were exceptional in their ability to select and deploy information and sustain a highly developed argument. The hardest thing for some candidates seemed to be the challenge to evaluate coherently as this is a skill where teachers and examiners can see real development over the two years that candidates study for A level. Questions 2 and 3 were most often approached in a straightforward way. Questions 1 and 4 proved to be the more difficult for many of the candidates who attempted them. Those candidates who understood the complexities of omniscience answered Q1 well, but others struggled to really understand and explain accurately. Some candidates struggled to find enough to say about Tillich for question 4 which meant they tended to write all they knew about religious language, without addressing the actual question, and in some cases merely mentioning Tillich in passing.

## Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

### 1 **Critically assess the philosophical problems raised by the belief that God is Omniscient. (35)**

Some of the best responses answered this question with a variety of approaches to omniscience, but always linked these closely to the spectrum of possible meanings attaching to the word. Most good responses demonstrated an ability to see a link between the notion of God's omniscience and the questions it raises for, at the very least, our self-perception of our freedom. Some candidates limited themselves by simply writing on Boethius, often struggling to repeat what he said accurately rather than applying his reflections to the question. Although candidates referred to God as being outside of time, for example, references to foreknowledge and the future indicated that many candidates had not properly grasped his view. Some candidates referred to middle knowledge but again it was far from clear that this had been understood.

A few candidates sidetracked themselves by writing on discussions about the nature of God not entirely relevant to the question, writing indiscriminately across omnipotence, omnibenevolence and omnipresence, with attendant confusion, or around the problem of evil, with only a small proportion of the whole actually related to the question. Those who discussed the issue of omniscience specifically in problem of evil were given appropriate credit.

### 2 **Evaluate the claim that belief in miracles leads to a belief in a God who favours some but not all of his creation. (35)**

This was a popular question which was generally answered well, with candidates able to discuss the notion that an acceptance of miracles leads to a partisan creator, who might therefore not be worthy of our worship. Some answers concentrated too much on the definition of miracles, which, while potentially relevant, needs to be related back to the question. There was good use of the thinking of Maurice Wiles which was often illustrated by good examples; both Biblical and modern. Better responses used this as a

springboard to focus on the goodness of God, the desirability of a belief in miracles and a consideration as to how or if God is involved with his creation. The best responses were able to summarise and evaluate Wiles' approach, while weaker responses sometimes displayed a notion that Wiles was arguing that miracles actually demonstrate that the deity is unjust and that Wiles did believe in such an unjust God.

Many answers discussed extensively the rationality or otherwise of belief in miracles as such, without persuasively relating this to the question. The weakest responses tended to lose focus and wrote general answers featuring a discussion of Hume, Swinburne and others.

**3 Evaluate the claim that there can be no disembodied existence after death. (35)**

Most candidates identified that this was a question specifically about disembodied existence and material outlining resurrection theories was only deployed as a contrast. They demonstrated detailed knowledge of thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle and Dawkins together with a good awareness of the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. Some made interesting use of the evidence of modern scientific research alongside traditional philosophical argument. Better responses used this material to raise issues about the disembodied state such as personal identity and recognition.

Weaker answers often showed a reasonable degree of subject knowledge but were not always able to apply it to the question. This led to answers where different views were described but with little engagement or analysis. Some candidates simply wrote a paragraph on each thinker they had covered in this topic without linking each specific theory to the notion of disembodied existence. A few candidates confused themselves by trying to link Buddhist views on life after death into the question; most of these suggested that Buddhists hold a belief in a soul, missing the concept of anatta.

Hick's replica model was used with remarkable frequency in response to this question. Weaker responses often oversimplified this, to the effect that Hick was attempting and failing to prove resurrection with this idea, rather than positing it as a possible model for how resurrection might be a reasonable possibility. Interestingly, Hick's own preferred more dualist view on humanity and the possibilities of life after death appears to be completely missing from candidates understanding.

**4 Critically assess the views of Paul Tillich on religious language. (35)**

This question was the least popular, and often the least effectively answered. A significant number of candidates barely wrote a side's worth of material on Tillich and then defaulted to a critical description of other positions about religious language listed on the specification. Some stronger answers took the notion of religious language as symbol as their starting point, using people such as Randall, Braithwaite and Jung, and evaluated Tillich in this context.

Weaker answers focussed on religious and non-religious symbols, missing the opportunity to show understanding of Tillich's views on religious language. Attempts at analysis of Tillich's approach therefore became analysis of the meaning or significance of religious symbols such as the Crucifix or the Star of David.

*Report on the Units taken in January 2010*

Once again a significant number of candidates tried to fit a pre-prepared answer on the principles of verification and falsification to this question and consequently were able to receive very little credit.

## G582 Religious Ethics

### General Comments:

The overall performance of the candidates was quite good. There were one or two outstanding answers that deserved higher than the maximum number of marks but there were also several other candidates who provided very good answers and some of these achieved the maximum mark. At the other end of the spectrum there were a smaller number of poor candidates but most did make reasonable attempts to answer the questions.

The paper allowed able candidates to perform extremely well and even poorer candidates could make some response (if they chose to). Candidates were able to include key concepts, theories and terminology. Good candidates evaluated and assessed the ideas as they wrote, poorer responses failed to show a consistent line of argument and often left it to the conclusion to answer the question.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question

No.

#### 1 **To what extent is ethical language meaningful? (35)**

There were some very good responses to this question; it clearly caught the imagination and abilities of some candidates and many of the best answers in this unit came from this question. Some candidates were positively enthused by discussing ethical language and did so with great flair.

Candidates were able to make links and cross-references to the problems of religious language and were able to make connections between these approaches to language.

Most answers were not poor but they tended to trot out the pre-prepared answer and therefore appeared (relatively) pedestrian.

There were no common errors or misconceptions.

#### 2 **'Utilitarianism is the best approach to environmental issues.' Discuss. (35)**

This was a popular question which was answered quite well. Those who did well were able to use the arguments of the Utilitarians in an effective manner and applied the range of arguments to environmental issues. Some excellent responses were able to tie in actual environmental issues such as dam building, or the destruction of rain forest to the different approaches of Bentham, Mill and Singer.

The less well answered questions tended to become ensnared in the general ethics of the ecological movement in a populist fashion and did not really answer the question directly. None were particularly bad –just pedestrian. There were, however, some very good evaluations of the relative merits of the different approaches of Utilitarians compared to other approaches both secular and religious, in coping with the myriad of problems posed by the environment.

Excellent answers were able to give some original interpretations of the different Utilitarian approaches; some suggested that preserving the environment could be considered one of Mill's higher pleasures.

**3 Assess the view that conscience need not always be obeyed. (35)**

Examiners noted a wide range of responses to the question, some very good. However, there was a tendency for some candidates to list (often not accurately) what they thought were the opinions of various scholars. Whilst this gained some credit, the key word in the question was “assess”. Many responses seemed to be a summary of all aspects surrounding conscience, seemingly using pre-prepared class notes, rather than focussing on the specific question asked. Such responses struggled to achieve more than a basic or satisfactory response.

Those responses which did “assess”, as the question required, generally did very well. Only responses which displayed appropriate evaluative and critical thinking accessed the top levels.

Again, no obvious errors or misconceptions were noted.

**4 ‘Some ethical theories are of more help than others when making decisions about sexual issues.’ Discuss. (35)**

Some responses to this question were excellent and they were a pleasure to read, interestingly many favouring both the Virtue Ethics of Aristotle and the more modern interpretations such as those of Hursthouse, Slote and Gilligan as the most useful in today’s world.

Some candidates wrote at length about masturbation and/or homosexuality which, while it may have been illuminating, failed to address the question in an appropriate manner.

Good candidates handled the material in a mature and reflective manner; weaker responses were simply opinions about sex and sexuality without references to the range of ‘ethical theories’. This showed the danger of the danger of allowing the popularisation of an ethical issue to override the ethical and philosophical thinking behind the issue of sexual behaviour.

## **G583 Jewish Scriptures**

### **General Comments:**

There were insufficient candidates entered to allow meaningful comment to be prepared.

## **G584 New Testament**

### **General Comments:**

There were insufficient candidates entered to allow meaningful comment to be prepared.

## **G585 Developments in Christian Theology**

### **General Comments**

There were no entries for this unit.

## G586 Buddhism

### General Comments:

In general candidates seemed to know what was expected of them, and showed a reasonable knowledge of the subject. There were very few rubric errors.

Many candidates seemed to approach questions in an AS style/manner by showing their knowledge of the topic first and leaving all their analysis and evaluation to the end. While this is a valid approach it was noted that candidates who showed evaluation throughout their responses tended to gain higher marks for AO2.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

**1 'It is impossible to understand nibbana.' Discuss. (35)**

Most candidates were able to demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the term nibbana, and some explored the nature of nibbana effectively. Candidates who explored the difficulty of describing nibbana, and thus understanding it, tended to have a good awareness of the difficulties of using samsaric language to describe something beyond samsara. Many then considered whether those in samsara could understand something beyond samsara.

Some candidates used their knowledge of sunyata to explore whether nibbana was in fact different to samsara. They then went on to consider whether this lack of differentiation made it easier or harder to understand nibbana.

Weaker responses often showed a poor understanding of the term nibbana or gave lots of descriptions of nibbana without discussing how they aided understanding of nibbana.

**2 Assess the importance of the Heart Sutra to Mahayana Buddhism. (35)**

It was pleasing how many answers showed a good awareness of the key ideas within the Heart Sutra. Most candidates were able to discuss the concepts of sunyata and svabhava clearly, and were able to place the Heart Sutra in context as a prajnaparamita text.

Most candidates considered the importance of the teachings of the Heart Sutra on their own merits, though some contrasted the importance of the Heart Sutra with that of the Lotus Sutra very effectively.

Weak responses tended to describe the Heart Sutra in detail, without drawing out the meaning of the Sutra or assessing its importance. In contrast the very best responses tended to explore the relationship between the teachings and specific Mahayana doctrines. One very good example of this was the exploration of the effect of the teaching of sunyata on Zen and Pure Land attitudes to nibbana, and thus their methods of reaching nibbana.

**3 To what extent is meditation the uniting feature of Buddhism? (35)**

Rather surprisingly this was the least popular question on the paper. Many candidates offered a fairly detailed analysis of samatha and vipassana meditation. This was usually followed by a mention of Zen meditations or the nembutsu in Pure Land Buddhism, and concluded with a paragraph exploring whether they did consider meditation to be a uniting feature of Buddhism or not. As a result AO1 marks were often higher than AO2 marks for these responses. Weaker answers tended to offer very basic descriptions of general meditation techniques showing little reference to specific Buddhist practices.

The best responses tended to explore specific meditation practices from a range of Buddhist schools. They then explored whether the presence of meditation made it a uniting feature, or whether the differences were significant enough to challenge this view. Some also made good use of other concepts, such as the aim of nibbana, to explore whether something else had a greater claim to be the uniting feature.

**4 'Pure Land Buddhism is merely a shortcut to nibbana.' Discuss. (35)**

Most candidates were able to construct an argument in response to this question. They often focused on the concept of upaya, and whether Pure Land teachings could be considered upaya or not.

Many responses however were let down by a lack of specific knowledge of Pure Land practices and teachings. Beyond mentioning that Pure Land Buddhists aim for the Pure Land instead of nibbana, and practice the nembutsu instead of extended meditation, most candidates were floundering.

The best responses did explore specific Pure Land teachings and practices. They considered the extent to which the Sukhvati Sutras were studied, and were aware of the extended practices used in Chinese Pure Land traditions. They were also aware of the differences between the Pure Land and True Pure Land schools in Japan.

## **G587 Hinduism**

### **General Comments**

There were no entries for this unit.

## G588 Islam

### General Comments:

Although there were very few candidates who entered for this unit the full range of ability was represented. Question 3 was the least popular but the all the questions differentiated well.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

Question  
No.

**1 To what extent is it true that all aspects of Islam involve believing in angels? [35]**

Candidates explained that angels are messengers who have no free will and no physical bodies though they can take on human shape. The specification itemises the following articles of belief: Allah, angels, scriptures, messengers, the last day, the divine decree (al Qadr) and some used this as a framework for 'all aspects'. Others took 'all aspects of Islam' more generally and wrote competent responses also.

Angels Mala'ikah are one of the articles of belief usually included with books and messengers under Risalah – Prophethood and most candidates commented on the role of angels as essential to the foundation of Islam, e.g. Jibra'il on Lailat ul Qadr.

Candidates pointed out that five times daily at salah Muslims acknowledge their angels and the essays showed sensitive understanding of Muslim acceptance of a world where angels play their part in the destiny of creation.

**2 Assess how the teachings in Surah 4 reflect the changes Muhammad ﷺ brought to the lives of women and the continuing effects of these teachings today. [35]**

Candidates began by explaining the role and treatment of women in tribal society in pre-Islamic Arabia and the changes that Muhammad ﷺ introduced to create a more just community in Madinah. Surah 4 is a set text and responses showed familiarity with the contents even if some had inadequate knowledge of the actual text.

Discussions about the roles and treatment of women today were lively but often did not really address the question. There were some competent attempts at a balanced assessment of the continuing effects which tried to give examples distinguishing between treatment of women based on culture and custom rather than on teachings from Surah 4.

**3 'Uthman was the most significant of the first four Khalifahs in the spreading of Islam.' Discuss. [35]**

The few who addressed this question did it quite well. They tended to provide a brief account of events after the death of Muhammad ﷺ and plodded through the previous Khalifahs charting their achievements before concentrating on 'Uthman (644-656 CE.). They acknowledged that he allowed the empire to spread westwards across North Africa and eastwards to the boundary of China and the Indus Valley in what is now Pakistan and organised the first Muslim navy. 'Uthman's appointment of his cousin Mu'awiya as Governor of Syria was argued to be a bad move for Islam because of the opposition to Ali as fourth Khalifah (656-661CE) but the candidates managed to give balanced accounts of the history.

The fact that 'Uthman was responsible, in 652CE, for deciding that there should be one official unchanging copy of the Qur'an was argued by some to be more significant for the spread of Islam than anything else apart from the will of Allah.

**4 To what extent is it true that the Sunnah provides the real basis for Muslim life? [35]**

Most candidates gave a definition of the Sunnah as the example of Muhammad ﷺ found in ahadith, sacred (qudsi) and prophetic, and sirah (biography) but one or two thought it was one book.

A few referred to some of the six main collections of ahadith. Some wrote well about the criteria by which the authenticity of each hadith is guaranteed and that ahadith can be classified as sahih (sound), hasan, (adequate), dai'if and saqim (weak and inferior).

Some explained the relative importance of the sources of authority for Muslim ethics: e.g. Shari'ah, the sacred Islamic Law, is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah but there are other ways of making decisions- Ijima' (consensus) and Quiyas (comparisons) though they are also based on the Qur'an and ahadith. One or two tried to argue that ijtihad potentially would provide a real basis for Muslim life. Most included the example of prayer in that the Qur'an tells Muslims when to pray, to face Makkah and to wash but for the basis for the words and movements Muslims copy what the Prophet used to say and do. Most, however, eventually settled for the Qur'an being the real basis for Muslim life.

## G589 Judaism

### General Comments:

There was a small entry for this unit. Responses were characterised by the candidates remaining focused on the demands of the question and selecting and using material which directly answered the question. In consequence, many performed well and were awarded high marks. Indeed, the Examiners were encouraged by the many high quality answers. Candidates who produced weaker responses were generally lacking in knowledge and did not maintain a strong focus on the question.

It is important that candidates balance their time: some spent much too long on one question with the result that they left themselves scoring less well on the second.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

- | Question<br>No. |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 1               | <p><b>Compare and contrast the ideas of messianic hope found in the books of Isaiah and Malachi. [35]</b></p> <p>Only two candidates attempted this question. Neither response contained more than a general introduction to the concept of the Messiah and a brief mention of the teaching of Maimonides and the Maharal of Prague. Little knowledge of the texts was demonstrated.</p>  |
| 2               | <p><b>Assess the claim that only the Sephardi are the true Jews. [35]</b></p> <p>On the whole, answers were somewhat disappointing. Candidates demonstrated little knowledge of the history of the two main divisions of world Jewry, and tended to assume that the differentiation between Sephardim and Ashkenazim was merely one of geographical location. Little understanding was shown of differences in ritual and liturgical matters, social habits etc.</p> <p>In general, candidates adopted a pluralist approach, pointing out e.g. that the modern state of Israel is a mixture of Sephardim and Ashkenazim. All were unanimous in their acknowledgement that all Jews received the Torah on Sinai, and therefore all Jews - Sephardi and Ashkenazi alike - have the right to be called true Jews.</p>      |
| 3               | <p><b>'The teachings of Rubenstein on post-Holocaust theology are more convincing than those of Fackenheim.' Discuss. [35]</b></p> <p>The question elicited some excellent responses. Candidates began their response by outlining the historical context to the Holocaust. They then outlined the principal features of each scholar's work, engaging in comparison.</p> <p>All candidates showed some awareness of Richard Rubenstein's position that the G-d of traditional Jewish faith is dead, yet still humanity has a profound need for something like the covenant or its functional equivalent. Equally, all candidates showed awareness of Fackenheim's position that in the death camps G-d decreed that the people must continue to survive: 'Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories.'</p> |

Most disagreed with the statement in the question, often arguing that Rubenstein's position is overly negative and merely a lifeline for those who do not wish to believe in G-d. On the other hand, Fackenheim's approach was reckoned to be positive - positing an ethic which constitutes commitment to the needs of one's fellow human beings.

**4 'Zionism has done more harm than good.' Discuss. [35]**

Most candidates began their response by outlining the origins and purposes of Zionism. They then proceeded to discuss the range of views associated with both the secular and religious Zionists and anti-Zionists.

Opinion on the question was fairly evenly divided. Some argued that Zionism as a political movement has done damage by denying Torah truth in the interests of national identity. Others argued that Zionism has laid the foundations for the ideal situation to be actualised in Israel- when the land shall one more occupy its rightful place as Judaism's heart in true Torah spirit.

# Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Religious Studies H172 H572  
January 2010 Examination Series

## Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
G571	Raw	70	50	43	37	31	25	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G572	Raw	70	46	40	34	28	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G573	Raw	70	48	42	37	32	27	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G574	Raw	70	52	45	39	33	27	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G575	Raw	70	46	40	34	28	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G576	Raw	70	42	37	32	27	22	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G577	Raw	70	49	42	35	28	21	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G578	Raw	70	55	48	41	34	28	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G579	Raw	70	50	43	36	29	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G581	Raw	70	51	43	36	29	22	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G582	Raw	70	50	44	38	32	26	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G583	Raw	70	56	49	42	35	28	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G584	Raw	70	47	43	39	35	32	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G585	Raw	70	0	0	0	0	0	0
	UMS	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
G586	Raw	70	56	49	43	37	31	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G587	Raw	70	0	0	0	0	0	0
	UMS	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
G588	Raw	70	57	51	45	39	34	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G589	Raw	70	56	49	42	35	28	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0

## Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>
<b>H172</b>	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>Total Number of Candidates</b>
<b>H172</b>	17.9	44.3	69.6	89.5	97.7	100	1009

**1009 candidates aggregated this series**

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums/index.html>

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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