

GCE

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H572**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H172**

OCR Report to Centres June 2014

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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G571 Philosophy of Religion (AS)

General Comments:

The paper provided a selection of questions that covered a wide range of topics in the specification. The questions were clear with the result that most responses were focused on the appropriate topics, and there were also opportunities for effective use of technical terms. Most candidates were able to select two questions that were written, according to their capabilities, within the specified time. There was evidence of sound knowledge and understanding, though some answers showed a lack of thorough revision and accurate knowledge of the scholars specified.

In general, scripts showed greater attention to presentation than has sometimes been the case, though there remain issues around the use of language. Spelling was sometimes uncertain, with the use of some strange compound terms, notably 'aswell', 'infact', 'infront', and 'inorder', and the verb 'to of' was too often used. Nevertheless, overall there was a general improvement in the standard of English, compared with some recent series.

More worrying was the continuing struggle of some candidates to master the fundamental grammar of philosophy. Terms frequently misused were 'prove' (for 'argue'), *a posteriori*, *a priori*, 'necessary', 'contingent' and 'predicate' – significant numbers of candidates remain unaware that a predicate is part of a sentence and is not a quality of a thing. To argue, as some candidates did, that 'God is synthetic' is to demonstrate nothing but ignorance of the meaning of the term. Examiners look for accurate and informed use of technical terms.

Responses demonstrated a wide range of ability, with many showing a high level of skill in engaging with the material. However, a significant number of responses indicated a lack of preparation for part (a) questions that required a comparison and equally, a number did not appear to have acquaintance with all of the specification thus making it difficult to answer all parts of a question. The least popular question was Q2 and the most popular question was Q1. In terms of evaluation, the main pitfalls were with Q1b and Q3b where arguments from theologians and Hume were presented rather than discussed. Weaker candidates tended towards answering questions 2 and 4, perhaps attracted by the option of writing in general terms about creation and God, although there were also numerous answers to questions 1 and 3 which were formulaic and uninspired. The best candidates demonstrated an impressive command of specialist vocabulary, and the best AO2 answers in particular were notable for their creative and thoughtful arguments, with Q1b and Q4b in particular offering scope for unusual and innovative approaches.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 a

This question was very well answered in general, although there was a lack of balance between free will and origin of evil with most answers focusing heavily on the traditional theodicies. In general, the balance was implicitly made if both Augustine (origin mainly) and Irenaeus (free will mainly) were dealt with. It was good to see that centres have clearly taken previous years' reports about the difference between Irenaeus and Hick on board as we saw many candidates explicitly point out the differences in these thinkers. This included good use of the concept of epistemic distance by Hick. However, the key ideas of Irenaeus were still missing in the large part. The potter and clay, mother and milk, Jonah and the whale and the rejection of universalism are still conspicuous by their absence. Despite this, many students scored

reasonably well on this question, particularly when they focused on the two parts of free will and source of evil. Some answers were too general, where candidates did not return to the question with the result being a satisfactory answer about the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus, rather than about origin of evil and the role of free will.

A small number of candidates were able to attribute the aesthetic principle, principle of plenitude and principle of harmony to Augustine. The strongest responses demonstrated ownership of this question, engaged well with it and offered a very clear and effective explanation of the beliefs regarding the origin of evil and the role of human free will; in weaker responses, the focus on the role of freewill was less strong. Some candidates spent a great deal of time critically evaluating the theodicies rather than explaining. The weakest responses fell back on what appeared to be a pre-prepared essay on the problem of evil, with a superficial explanation of Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies. Some candidates were able to make good use of process theologian's views on the origins of evil and the role of free will.

1 b

Despite a significant number of candidates not knowing what a theodicy was, this question was generally well answered. Some very thoughtful and reflective answers indicated the usual weaknesses but also balanced this with what else was on offer and raised some good personal questions in response to the issues. This question saw a number of responses that attempted to answer the question through posing a series of rhetorical questions, which is likely to lead to a judgement of 'asserted argument', and therefore Level 2. The weakest responses barely asserted viewpoints, but gave a vague 'theodicies fail because it depends on what people believe' response.

The very best responses provided a range of evidence and gave detailed, critical analysis of a range of views. Weaker responses failed to critically explore the theodicies and the weakest mistook theodicy for theory and so provided little or no relevant argument. Some candidates attributed the notion of universal salvation to Irenaeus rather than Hick.

Good and better responses grappled well with criticisms of Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies showing a good understanding of criticisms such as how a perfect world can move to an imperfect state as well as problems with the sheer volume of suffering in the world, the counter-productive nature of suffering and in some, the problem of animal suffering. Better candidates were able to demonstrate that the evidential problem of evil is not resolved by the ends justifying the means, through the work of Dostoyevsky or D Z Philips. Others were able to identify flaws in theodicies raised by different scholars, including those highlighted by Schleiermacher (logical, moral and scientific errors) in relation to Augustine's theodicy; Mill's criticisms about the sheer extent of (particularly, natural) evil; and Dostoyevsky's comments on innocent suffering. Most found Irenaeus' theodicy to hold more weight.

2 a

Surprisingly, this question elicited a very weak set of responses with many candidates showing only a superficial understanding of creationist views. The Weakest responses simply repeated statements about how all creationists believe the account given in the Bible whilst good answers had an understanding of progressive creationists, and young and old earth versions. Some confusion appeared over teleological arguments and creationist views.

Many responses followed a biblical approach with a handful providing responses that fit closely with the printed mark scheme e.g. Flat Earth Creationists and others. However, examiners were able to credit a range of interpretations of the question. Many responses proved to be repetitive. Some candidates commented on Biblical views about the beginning of the universe, made reference to scripture and then continued to use the same example a number of times. This often gave the impression that the candidate could not select relevant information.

Common problems seemed to be: a creation account which mentioned creation from nothing; no real awareness of 'creationists' but a presentation of versions of the design argument; and some vague awareness of what a creationist is and the fact that some were different from others. The confusion of Gap Creationists persisted with candidates suggesting that the gap was between Genesis 1 and 2 rather than Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. There was little mention of Flat Earth Creationists or Henry Morris' Young Earth Creationism. Better responses distinguished Young Earth, Old Earth and Progressive Creationists, and there were a number of effective accounts of various positions with some useful references to key writers and texts, for example, Henry Morris and the Genesis Flood. The best responses showed nuanced appreciation of the range of positions that are encompassed within Creationism, and in particular tended to make the point that Creationism is not necessarily incompatible with the Big Bang and modern science. Some candidates identified Behe and Intelligent Design as a Creationist view, which may be disputed by this scientific movement, although it has been adopted by some Creationists, so was credited appropriately.

2 b

As a significant number of candidates could not fully explain the different creationist viewpoints in Part a), it meant that their answers lacked any real content. Not many looked at the compatible viewpoint where creationist views can sit side by side with the Big Bang theory. Many answers were able to explain the theory of the Big Bang and argue why this is a better explanation for the universe. However, many responses showed a misunderstanding of the Big Bang itself, describing rocks colliding together and making a big explosion, rather than the starting point of a singularity. This seems to be caused by a misunderstanding of the Large Hydron Collider experiment. Others used evolution as interchangeable with Big Bang Theory and thus the focus of their answers moved away from the question. The simplest answers merely stated that the Big Bang Theory had more evidence, without seeking to support this with evidence from Red Shift or Cosmic Background Radiation.

Better responses focused more on the debate between science and religion with some utilising their knowledge on philosophical issues around the beginning of the universe, for example, the ultimate questions of why there is anything at all, or the debate around mechanism and meaning (the how/why debate).

3 a

This was a popular question eliciting many good and excellent answers. Some candidates explained Aquinas' ideas about motion, cause and contingency very well; others were more general "the world has to have come from somewhere" type answers. Some candidates wasted some precious examination time by describing Aquinas' Fourth and Fifth 'Way'. Others had difficulty in distinguishing between Aquinas' First 'Way' (motion/change) and his Second 'Way' related to cause. Only the best responses were able to explain why Aquinas argued against infinite regress. This lack of understanding made it harder for them to explain Hume's challenge in Part b). Generally, the first two 'Ways' were explained well although some candidates mixed the two arguments together. They are similar, but also distinct and candidates should be aware that in the first 'Way' attention is focused on the fact that things are passive recipients - acted upon through change - whereas in the Second 'Way' attention is on things as agents - an active cause bringing about an effect.

Some candidates were not able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the word 'contingent' and therefore were unable to express Aquinas' argument coherently. Many simply linked the Third 'Way' to infinite regress rather than to the idea if nothing existed at one point, nothing would exist now unless there was a different kind of being, a necessary being.

A significant number were only able to explain Aquinas' version and did not look at Copleston at all, thus only answering half of the question. Such responses could only be judged on half the marks. Where Copleston was used, most answers linked his argument to Aquinas' Third 'Way' and the concepts of contingency and necessity. For a number of answers, this was the weakest section and did not progress any further into Copleston's argument. Many used Copleston's example of contingency, "I rely on my parents", with a few quoting the Copleston-Russell debate and using the example of sheep and chocolate. Some excellent answers explained that the totality of contingent beings needed an external explanation for their existence and that infinite regress did not provide an adequate explanation. A number of responses mentioned Copleston's reliance on Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason, the best ones explaining how and why this led to the conclusion of a necessary being external to the universe which contained within itself the reason for its existence.

3 b

The weakest responses demonstrated no knowledge of Hume's criticisms of the Cosmological Argument, and confusion between Hume and Russell was widespread. There was also a disappointing failure to evaluate Hume's arguments, some responses simply recounting some of them without any assessment of their coherence or validity. The better answers made excellent use of the Fallacy of Composition to argue that Hume did indeed succeed in refuting the argument, while the argument that an infinite universe is no less plausible than an infinite Creator was also used effectively in some of the most persuasive answers.

Many had an awareness of the germination of the 'fallacy of composition' and discussed this. Widespread misappropriation of Hume's fallacy of affirmation of the consequent resulted in the claim that Hume used a bus analogy (sometimes with aliens) to challenge the relationship between cause and effect. Few candidates were able to identify Hume's claim that whatever mysterious element could be attributed to God could just as easily be said of the universe itself. A significant number of candidates confused Hume's critique of the Design argument with that of the Cosmological argument.

4 a

Generally this question was answered well and it was one of the more popular questions. Some candidates gave an explanation of the four causes and linked the Prime Mover to the final cause; some of those, however, spent too long on the four causes. Not all answers made this link with the final cause, instead choosing to mistakenly describe the Prime Mover as the efficient cause of the universe and thus introducing some confusion, claiming that both God and the Prime Mover were creators, missing Aristotle's understanding of the eternal nature of the universe.

Many were able to explain the nature and attributes of Aristotle's Prime Mover, including the transcendent, eternal and immutable aspects. The better responses understood how the Prime Mover caused *motus* or change by attracting everything towards it - pure actuality and perfection. Some answers were unbalanced in their comparison but most managed to show some clear similarities and differences with the Judaeo-Christian God. For example, differences of involvement in the world and with humans, drawing on their knowledge of the biblical texts. Many made reference to the "omni" qualities of God, some weaker responses incorrectly attributing them to the Prime Mover as well. Interesting points were also made about both beings being "unmoved movers", and the source of all change and motion in the universe, though with the Judeo-Christian God retaining involvement and interaction, most notably in the incarnation. There was some technical inaccuracy in the use of the term deism and the subsequent attribution to the Prime Mover.

This question produced two styles of response, those where comparison was woven throughout and those that explained one concept followed by the other and then perhaps remembered to compare the two at the end. Both styles were credited accordingly, depending on accuracy, detail and comparison.

4 b

The discriminator of “more believable” was not deconstructed as effectively as it might have been in many cases, as a number of answers simply contrasted the philosophical reasons for believing in the Prime Mover with the theological and historical reasons for believing in the Judeo-Christian God, and came down on one side or the other, often without much sense of a reasoned consideration having led to the chosen conclusion.

Better approaches reflected appreciation of the context of a living faith tradition underpinning belief in the Judeo-Christian God (e.g. the sheer number of believers) as opposed to relative ignorance about Aristotle’s writings, and there were a number of notable references to phenomena such as miracles and prayers being answered which were used very effectively to argue that the Judeo-Christian God was more believable as He was experienced directly, rather than simply encountered as an idea. Some students argued the case from the problem of evil, either proposing that a Prime Mover was more believable being removed from and unable to do anything to stop evil, or alternatively that the Judeo-Christian God was more believable because He provided a source of hope and salvation in the face of suffering.

G572 Religious Ethics (AS)

General Comments

There were a number of good, very good and excellent responses from candidates who appeared this year to have given thought as to how best to answer the Part a) and Part b) questions, with more time being spent on the former. The most popular questions were 1 and 3; however, there are still some candidates who do not seem to be able to apply ethical theories to ethical issues. Some candidates also seem to have little understanding of the meaning of technical terms such as deontological and teleological which are often used indiscriminately.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 a

There were a number of very good responses and on the whole this question was answered very well, with many candidates able to give sound explanations of the ideas of Bentham, Mill and Singer. Some candidates showed good mastery of the detail involved in distinguishing between the three, and explaining the differences between act and rule, and weak and strong rule Utilitarianism. The hedonic calculus did pose a problem for some candidates who either listed it or listed some of it with no idea what it meant. Better responses used an example to give a quick and simple explanation of how it might be applied.

Some candidates were limited in their responses by simply defining Utilitarianism as the 'greatest good for the greatest number'. This prevented a full development of Bentham's approach based on 'pleasure' and Mill's based on 'happiness'. Some candidates limited their explanation of Mill to higher and lower pleasures, with little reference to his concept of 'competent judges' as an approach to the understanding of the differences between higher and lower pleasures and the establishment of general rules.

There were some very good explanations of preference Utilitarianism, using Hare, Singer and Brandt; however, many candidates had limited knowledge of this approach. There were some very general comments about the maximisation of preferences and some even saying that a person's own preferences should come first.

1 b

There were a number of good responses showing good engagement with the question, often by contrasting the approaches of the different forms of Utilitarianism or contrasting one form of Utilitarianism with other ethical theories. Many responses, however, failed to show any evaluation and simply stated what Utilitarianism would do. Some candidates' responses showed a very limited idea of what 'right to a child' meant, despite this being in the specification. Thus some candidates wrote about abortion or a child's right to a loving home.

There were, however, some excellent responses from candidates which showed the ability to think through a variety of issues in response to the question, such as whether 'rights' existed or whether there should be any differentiation at all between individuals dependent on, for example, their financial background, age or the status of their relationship.

2 a

The responses to this question were varied and a number of candidates were not able to explain different 'approaches to pacifism'. Some showed sound knowledge, most answering from Christianity and in addition to biblical material were able to differentiate between absolute pacifist groups such as the Quakers and their Peace Testimony, and contingent pacifism where war was to be avoided at all costs based on the teaching of Jesus regarding love for one's enemies etc. Some responses cited useful examples such as Bonhoeffer and his struggle to accommodate his pacifist belief with the need to fight evil. Some candidates, however, gave very simplistic answers using biblical quotations with no real explanation or simply outlining the key tenets of Just War theory.

2 b

Many responses were very general with candidates simply limiting themselves to highlighting the argument that religious people should not allow war because of general pacifist beliefs. However, other responses maintained a focus on the challenging idea of what a 'true religious believer' might be, and the beliefs they might hold with regard to war. There were some good discussions on the role of Just War theory, but many simply ignored this and as a result gave a very limited response with few examples and little supporting evidence.

3 a

There were a number of pleasing responses to this question with candidates showing a good level of knowledge of Kantian ethics and the role of the Categorical Imperative. Some candidates were able to provide a clear and coherent background to the Categorical Imperative with an overview of key ideas such as duty and good will. Applying the various formulations of the Categorical Imperative to an ethical issue was done successfully by a number of candidates. Issues such as truth-telling, euthanasia, contraception and genetic engineering were all raised. The most popular issue was abortion, but here, some candidates limited themselves by stating that it could not be universalised or the human race would die out and that it treated the embryo/foetus as a means to an end. Very few discussed how Kant might have viewed the foetus.

Many candidates showed limited understanding of the third formulation of the Categorical Imperative, regarding the individual becoming a law-making and law-abiding member of the Kingdom of Ends.

3 b

There were a number of good responses which successfully focused on the key term in the question as to there being 'no serious weaknesses' regarding the Categorical Imperative. Such responses were able to present a range of arguments, including the problem of universalising maxims, conflicting duties, the complexity involved in applying the Categorical Imperative and more general issues that arise from the lack of any consequential aspect to the theory. Some responses were able to raise strengths and the corresponding weaknesses.

4 a

This question seemed to be completed either really well or really badly. Some candidates produced well balanced responses covering the diversity and dependency thesis in cultural relativism, the ideas of Richard Rorty and the emotivism of A J Ayer. There were good contrasts made between the objectivism of absolutism and the more subjective approach of relativism. Some candidates included examples from normative ethical theories which had relative applications, such as Utilitarianism and Situation Ethics, to support their explanation.

Some candidates produced limited responses by being not entirely clear as to what is meant by 'relative morality'.

4 b

There were some good, well balanced responses that contrasted the approach of relativism with that of a more absolute approach, such as Kantian ethics or Natural Law, in order to evaluate which approach was best. Some candidates were successful in highlighting the problem inherent in relativist approaches, that judgements have to be entirely consequential and that there are no clear boundaries or limits to such an approach. Some candidates made useful judgements based on whether the genetic engineering involved concerned humans, animals or plants. However, some responses were limited by a lack of knowledge regarding genetic engineering and were often simply discussions of IVF and the different approaches taken to it.

G573 Jewish Scriptures (AS)

General Comments:

There were some excellent answers from well-prepared candidates who were able to quote the set texts and to make secure references in support of their points. Other responses often provided narrative summary of large parts of the texts but without referring back to the question. Candidates should avoid wasting time re-writing the question and it is recommended that they produce answers to match the marks available in the questions.

Most candidates appeared to be competently aware of the need to structure their answers and the majority showed clear paragraphing. In a small number of instances examiners had difficulty reading the scripts. Centres might be mindful of this when considering candidates for access arrangements. There were no rubric errors.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 a

Most candidates began with some explanation of the term 'covenant'; several candidates identifying the Hebrew word *berit*. Some included useful discussion of the roots of the biblical concept in Ancient Near Eastern treaties, notably, Hittite suzerain treaties. Such discussion gained credit but was not essential for full marks. Weaker answers tended to rely on narrative and description, and they often displayed limited knowledge of important features of the covenant, such as G-d taking the initiative and the role of faith.

1 b

The best responses came from candidates who focused on the words 'most important aspect' in the question. A good number pointed out that Abraham was called by G-d to set out in faith to a new land, and went on to discuss the centrality and sanctity of the Land of Israel. For a significant minority, the promise that Abraham and his descendants will be the people of G-d constituted 'the most important aspect' of the covenants.

2 a

There were many good answers from those who showed detailed knowledge of the text and who were often able to give a precise context to the passage, including the public theophany and the role of Moses as the mediator between G-d and the newly formed nation. Most candidates were able to comment at length on the Ten Commandments; however, very few showed any awareness that the conclusion of Exodus 20 includes the rulings about the building of altars.

2 b

Much discussion centred on the Ten Commandments as the fundamental laws of the Jews. Many candidates argued the greater importance of the Book of the Covenant in that it included casuistic laws and, as one candidate expressed, showed that G-d "cares about things that may be deemed trivial".

3 a

The responses of less well prepared candidates tended to include extensive commentary on all three Elijah stories laid out in the specification, whereas the question focused on the political and social religious ethics surrounding the episode of Naboth's vineyard. Most candidates included discussion of Jezebel's role in the execution of Naboth and Elijah's subsequent confrontation with the king, but few discussed the culpability of others involved in the incident and the implications of this in terms of Israelite society in general.

3 b

In the best responses, candidates used the texts to very good effect in support of their answers. Most began by outlining what they perceived to be the function and role of a prophet, and then made reference to all three Elijah stories included in the specification. The majority opinion was that, as G-d's spokesperson, Elijah must do as he was commanded, whatever that entailed.

4 a

Nearly all answers demonstrated sound knowledge of the set texts, but at the lower end of the mark range there was less discrimination and direction to the question, as candidates tended to give an account of the story of Jonah and the story of Job. Many demonstrated understanding by distinguishing the types of literature to be found in the Jewish Scriptures, emphasising that which is hard to believe as historical fact but not hard to believe as parables or wisdom literature.

4 b

The question led to some interesting and thoughtful responses. Most candidates drew on evidence given in the first part of the question to consider the nature of the books of Jonah and Job and the type(s) of literature that each might represent. The majority opinion was that the two works are better understood as literary constructs highlighting theological truths.

G574 New Testament (AS)

General Comments:

In general, all the questions were answered well. It was pleasing to see candidates displaying a sound knowledge of their set topics and texts and mostly selecting the appropriate material for the question under consideration. Most avoided purely descriptive answers and many properly latched on to the 'explain' focus of the Part a) questions and were able to point out a diversity of meanings in the key texts. A few slipped into evaluative mode and need to be careful to keep this in store for the Part b) questions. Contemporary scholarship was used well to illuminate points, though there were some misattributions of ideas – something to watch.

The evaluative, Part b) questions were generally well done. The best candidates wove clear discussions, encompassing a range of views and tied things together with a clear conclusion which related back to the question set. Weaker candidates tended to repeat the a) question, give a single point of view, ignore key words in the question or leave little time for discussion or a reasoned conclusion.

Some handwriting was very difficult to read.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 a

This was a popular question and produced a number of very good responses. High scoring scripts focused on the key word 'significance' in the title and looked at the role of the Essenes in Jewish society and some also looked at the significance of Essene theology in the wider perspective of first century Judaism, explaining the unique insight that the Dead Sea Scrolls offer into concepts such as messiahship and scripture. Weaker responses tended to write a 'distinctive beliefs' essay avoiding a clear discussion of 'significance'.

1 b

This question was well done and candidates impressed with their grasp of Jesus' theology which went beyond the confines of the AS specification. Many focused on Jesus' actions in the temple and made links with the Essenes' rejection of the Jerusalem temple. Others made links between Jesus, John the Baptist and the Essenes or looked at Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God and Essene eschatology. The conclusions were many and varied and all were given appropriate credit.

2 a

This question was mostly well done. The best answers provided a detailed commentary on Matthew's resurrection account, making links to Mark as they went along. Candidates were differentiated by their grasp of detail and it was pleasing to see some excellent responses which latched on to small differences between the texts which were extremely useful for highlighting the differences between Mark and Matthew's theology. Weaker responses tended to be descriptive, general or omit key differences, such as Jesus' appearance to Mary.

2 b

A number of responses repeated Part a) but most latched on to the question and addressed it head on. Most candidates wrote about source criticism and argued that since Matthew used Mark as a source, the similarities between the two did not prove the story was true. Very good candidates played around with the notion of truth and made the distinction between historical and theological truth.

3 a

A number of candidates who answered this question did not actually discuss Peter's denial itself but wrote extensively about the build-up to the denial, particularly Jesus' foresight and prediction after the Last Supper. This was legitimate but better candidates were able to combine this with an explanation of the actual denial and made links between Jesus' response to trial and Peter's response to questioning. Some very good answers looked in depth at Mark's reasons for featuring the denial and explained reasons for it being historical or theological.

A few candidates interpreted the question as the 'significance' of Peter's denial for Christians today. Candidates should be encouraged to keep their discussion within the confines of New Testament theology.

3 b

A number of responses gave one sided arguments to this question and simply stated whether they thought Mark was too harsh or not. Better responses discussed Mark's reasons for presenting the disciples in a harsh light – some thought it was historical as Mark was the 'interpreter of Peter' whilst others argued that Mark as a member of a gentile Christian community had an axe to grind against the disciples. The best focused in on 'too harshly' and discussed whether it was possible to judge this.

4 a

This was probably the least popular and least well done question on the paper. A few candidates wrote out the account of the Crucifixion and a few floundered after a discussion of Old Testament themes in the Crucifixion account. Better candidates tended to balance an explanation of how Mark shows Jesus to be fulfilling Old Testament texts in the Crucifixion (making links to the Suffering Servant, Maccabean martyr and sacrificial themes) with ideas earlier in the Passion Narrative where Jesus is shown to know his fate and be aware of his imminent death; candidates who followed this line of argument gave excellent examples from the Last Supper, agony in the garden of Gethsemane and from the Passion Predictions (although these were not a set text).

4 b

This question was well done and there was a range of arguments given. Candidates showed a good understanding of the set texts and mainly came to clear conclusions. A number lost the focus of the question and looked at either the Jews or the Romans but the majority managed to keep the notion of equal blame firmly in their sights.

G575 Developments in Christian Theology (AS)

General Comments:

The general understanding of this unit improves year by year. Candidates who performed well showed a personal engagement with the ideas and were also able to develop their own interpretation often with impressive maturity.

In general, Part b) answers failed to argue or discuss the question and often merely repeated material covered in Part a) or simply presented more information. Those who did well planned an argument ending with a conclusion which directly answered the question.

Centres might wish to refer to the G575 teachers' notes and suggested reading and resources on the OCR website.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This was a very popular question and there were some impressively good answers which demonstrated an understanding well beyond AS level.

1 a

Most answers showed awareness of Augustine's interest in original sin and its peculiar effect on the human will which both 'wills the good' but fails to carry it out even when driven by faith. Some referred to Romans 7 and the divided or 'half-wounded' will.

Weaker answers tended to focus largely on Augustine's life rather than his ideas: many told the story of when he stole fruit from an orchard as a child – candidates offered a wide variety of different fruits from pears to pineapples. Candidates often confused (and in some cases fused) the ideas of Augustine, Calvin and Aquinas.

Many did not fully understand that akrasia is a problem and is not a possession of a quality, nor is it to be equated with concupiscence. However, those who did understand the difference were able to explain concupiscence as Augustine's contribution to the akrasia problem; some very good answers also explained that concupiscence is more than just the libido.

There were many good and excellent answers which discussed the relationship of caritas, cupiditas, friendship and the good will pre- and post-Fall and in particular the characteristics of the sexualised body post-Fall.

1 b

The question invited a variety of responses, not necessarily theological; those who defined and discussed 'good' first, usually wrote very good answers. Indeed, very good answers considered and discussed the ideas of Sartre, Kant, Hobbes, Niebuhr and others. Most commonly, many argued that because God is good and humans are created in his image, humans must also be good; good answers discussed whether this could be so if humans are 'essentially' good and to what extent the Fall has corrupted essential goodness. Some excellent answers understood the philosophical problems of the akrasia debate and were able to analyse Augustine and moral/psychological intention with impressive academic maturity.

Weaker candidates simply repeated their knowledge of Augustine from Part a) or more commonly simply listed ideas without analysis or discussion.

Question 2

This was not a popular question and was often done badly or, in a few cases, extremely well. Those who treated Part a) just as a question about biblical hermeneutics failed to focus sufficiently on authority and inspiration to gain high marks.

2 a

Good answers often began with fundamentalism and then discussed conservative (traditional) and liberal responses to the claim that the Bible is literally the Word of God. Some candidates gave good examples of how the Bible may appear to contradict itself and how this is resolved by different interpretative approaches and the better answers focused on the reasons for disagreement amongst Christian theologians.

Weaker candidates did not explain or distinguish between authority and inspiration. Many candidates launched into fundamentalism, conservatism and liberalism without explaining how they related to the issue of authority.

2 b

There were many good answers (even from those who had written less well on Part a) which considered whether the modern scientific world was compatible with the biblical world view.

Some excellent answers argued that no text is out of date as it is the reader-text relationship which matters; the chronological gap is irrelevant. (Some candidates referred to Ricoeur's hermeneutical theories to support their answers.)

Weaker arguments often just repeated what had been covered in Part a).

Question 3

This was a very popular question: where candidates did less well was often not a problem of knowledge but a failure to refer to the three elements of the Part a) question.

3 a

Candidates who focused on the question and gave clear reference to 'organisation, purpose and theology' usually did very well - especially those who really understood the theological underpinning of CEBs. Good answers looked at the three mediations in action and the *revisio de vida* as orthopraxis. Excellent answers addressed the anti-dualistic aims of CEBs between spirit/matter when considering the functioning of the church.

The most common fault was the failure to explain the theological purpose of CEBs i.e. the *iglesia popular*, the church of the people on earth, and enactment of Acts 4 and Revelation 21 and 'base' as the preferential option for the poor as expressed in the Beatitudes (for example). Almost all answers outlined the historical reasons for CEBs but often spent too long on this area and not enough time on the other parts of the question.

There was some confusion about the role of lay deacons. Many described them as 'semi-priests' and even thought they *were* priests. Good answers were able to describe the role of the lay-deacon and catechist fulfilling Friere's pedagogic role as 'animator' especially at the hermeneutical stage.

3 b

Good answers looked at the decline of CEBs in recent years and the social success of many Latin American countries independently of CEBs. Some wondered whether CEBs had ever been successful and sensibly considered how success is to be measured. Some very good answers considered whether CEBs are too political and secular and fail therefore to be an effective part of the Church's ministry.

Question 4

This was not a very popular question but was often done well by those who attempted it. Most answered Part a) with reference to James Cone's black theology. A pleasing number of candidates this year chose to discuss dalit theology.

4 a

Of those who chose James Cone's black theology, good answers discussed more than just his Christology and also considered the main themes of liberation theology such as: conscientisation, reversal and suspicion of all 'white' theology.

Some answered this question by considering how either dalits or homosexuals or racial minorities are alienated because of their place on the 'underside of history'. Most then considered the response of the various liberative theologies with reference to themes such as: exodus; Jesus' challenge to authority; His ministry with the oppressed. Very good answers were more specific and explained the biblical passages which dealt with the treatment of the oppressed subject e.g.: women; the wilderness/wandering theme for dalits; the cross as the lynching tree for black Americans. Some excellent answers focused on the idea of 'irruption' and the oppressed as the 'underside of history'

Weaker responses tended to make little reference to liberative ideas; a few wrote about Latin American liberation theology and some wrote solely on Marxism.

4 b

Generally, this question was well answered. Most candidates focused on the Church's suspicion of liberation theologians' use of Marxism and offered some good discussion on whether they had used Marxism too much or too little. Many candidates argued that the Church had failed to bring about social transformation. On the other hand, some excellent answers argued in favour of the Church's right to be wary of Marxist materialism and the loss of spiritual values which should be at the heart of Christian values.

Some candidates were aware of current thinking and wrote about changing attitudes in the contemporary Roman Catholic Church and that Pope Francis may be more open to liberation theology than his predecessors.

G576 Buddhism (AS)

General Comments:

Candidates seemed to be well prepared for the exam and the level of knowledge of Buddhist concepts and the Pali/ Sanskrit was very high. Some candidates demonstrated an extremely high level of knowledge and understanding of the specification content. Many could articulate this understanding and show a wide range of examples to support their ideas. Many candidates seemed to really understand the nature of the Buddhist concepts outlined in the specification and could show how these are interrelated. This meant that their responses attracted higher marks.

However, some candidates demonstrated knowledge but did not fully articulate this with suitable exemplification to show understanding. For example some candidates told the stories of King Asoka or describe the events in the life of the Buddha but did not translate this knowledge to the question and show how it is important.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1a: Candidates knew the story of King Asoka and could explain the contribution he made to Buddhism in India. However, not all candidates could fully articulate the importance of his actions. Some good responses took each aspect of Asoka's actions such as the rock edicts, clearing out the Sangha and developing social institutions to benefit the vulnerable and showed the impact of each one. For example, showing how the rock edicts promulgated Buddhist ideas and promoted the following of them. They often followed this up in part b.

Question 1b: Many were able to evaluate Asoka's actions and judge whether or not they helped Buddhism. Many made really good use of the information they used in part a) to help this response. For example, many candidates showed how the rock edicts spread the Buddhist ideals across the Asokan Empire and Asoka's own behaviour backed this up. Whereas his interference in the sangha may have harmed Buddhism with his ideas possibly, taking prominence. Some even suggested that by becoming the state religion Buddhism had to make compromises and therefore this weakened it. Others followed Batchelor's view that Buddhism was not a religion but became so when its popularity demanded certain rituals which were not originally there, and this harmed Buddhism.

Question 2a: This was a popular question and candidates responded to it in many different ways. Some showed that through outlining key events in his life the Buddha's importance as a refuge can be seen. For example, many focused on the human nature of the Buddha and his life in the palace, the three sights and his enlightenment all of which show that anyone can achieve enlightenment. Others showed the nature of the Buddha from a Theravada and Mahayana perspective thus showing his importance in a range of different ways. This tended to focus on the differences between the ways in which the Buddha is seen by different traditions in Buddhism. Some responses used the Trikaya doctrine to show the importance of the Buddha.

Question 2b: Many candidates missed the word 'today' when responding to the question. This did not significantly affect their marks but it did highlight an issue that candidates are not reading and understanding the whole question. On the whole responses were good with many different reasons why the Buddha is and is not the most important refuge today. Many used elements of the part a to help them, others evaluated the views they had already commented on.

Question 3a: This was very popular and candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the eightfold path and how it works to help overcome the three fires. The candidates which did not gain the higher marks on this question often did not focus enough attention on the relationship between sila, prajna and Samadhi. Some candidates took each one in turn and described it then showed its relationship with the others. Better candidates showed how the elements within each inter-relate with other aspects and concepts within and outside of the eightfold path.

Question 3b: Candidates did not always fully address the relationship aspect of the question. Where they did they showed a wide range of reasons why practising sila is the best place to start (or otherwise). However, some candidates' responses were held back by their lack of analysis of the views they had presented. They did show why sila is a good/ bad place to start but candidates would be wise to explain *why* it is a good/ bad place to start and then evaluate the reasons why. This is the critical evaluation expected in the highest level.

Question 4a: This was the least popular and some candidates could not really articulate the similarities and differences between forest and village dwelling bhikkhus. Differences seem to predominate and too many focused on just these. Some candidates chose to talk about a small number of similarities and differences and explain each at length which gave much better responses than those who almost listed all the similarities and differences they knew.

Question 4b: Candidates who attempted this either really understood it and could show how village dwelling and forest dwelling Bhikkhus did or did not follow the example of the Buddha and gave a range of detailed examples to support these points. However, some just gave a superficial account of how the Buddha lived in a forest and not in a geographically fixed Sangha and therefore the forest dwelling Bhikkhus are following his example. This was not sufficient for the higher marks. Part b responses need to go beyond the superficial arguments and really analyse the views presented to get the highest marks.

G577 Hinduism (AS)

General Comments:

The entry was small, but the full range of ability was represented. There were no wholly blank scripts and no rubric errors.

All questions were attempted although Question 3 was noticeably less popular than the others on the paper.

Many responses contained irrelevant, generic or repeated material - candidates appeared to be writing everything they knew rather than selecting and applying according to the question. This was especially evident in Questions 3 and 4.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1a

This was generally a poorly answered question; no candidate clearly understood the difference between monism and monotheism and consequently they could not fully address the question set.

1b

Most candidates did understand 'polytheism' and therefore were apparently better equipped to tackle the b) part of the question but, lacking an understanding of monism, some struggled to offer an alternative view to agreement with the premise stated in the question.

2a

Candidates had a lot of knowledge to bring to both a) and b) parts to this question; all were aware of the bhakti path and the ways in which it is different to the other margas and most were able to deploy other, related concepts effectively to help them answer the question. There was a tendency towards evaluation in the material given for the a) part, with some candidates effectively writing their answer for b) as part of the a) response and then having to rewrite it afterwards. Candidates seemed to find a degree of evaluation against the other options inherent in the term 'important'.

2b

Part b) was answered reasonably well although, as noted, there was significant overlap with part a); some candidates had a significantly more limited understanding of jnana than they did of bhakti (none had the opposite problem).

3a

The question was not popular and the responses which were offered were disappointing. Candidates, in general, discussed Shakti in specific personifications as Hindu goddesses rather than engaging with the more general concept of shakti as feminine energy and/or the source of movement and change; there was also considerable time devoted to describing the consorts of these goddesses which has extremely limited relevance to the question asked.

3b

For part b) the arguments offered tended towards the simplistic (and arguable) – mainly centred around the statement that there are more gods so it is easier to choose goddesses to worship.

4a

Probably the best responses overall were given to this question, and it was one of the most popular questions (with Q2). Candidates had a lot of knowledge about the role and importance of Vishnu, which addressed the 'why' aspect of the question and enough knowledge about Hindu worship in general to deal with the 'how' element, although few discussed specific forms of worship connected with Vishnu. Having the two elements to the a) section did make this a challenging question. However, candidates dealt with it well in general.

4b

Part b) was also generally answered well.

G578 Islam (AS)

General comments:

The overall standard of responses resembled previous years, however, as with last year there was a slightly higher proportion of candidates writing top level answers. There still appear to be candidates answering the questions they have, presumably, practised in class instead of addressing the direct wording of the question being asked. This obviously has a huge impact on their marks and overall grade but is something that can be easily rectified.

Questions 1, 3 and 4 were probably the most popular of the four questions, although there was still a large number of candidates attempting to answer Question 2 as well. On the whole, the part b) questions were not answered as well as the part a) questions. This seems to indicate that some candidates need to work on improving their evaluative skills.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 a

This was a very popular question and the majority of candidates answered it to, at least, a reasonable level. There was a small minority, however, who confused the Shahadah with Salah and so failed to get many marks on this question. At this level all candidates should be familiar with the basic terminology - this would ensure that candidates do not lose marks needlessly. Most candidates were able to quote the Shahadah and went on to discuss the more obvious points of theological significance such as those of Tawhid and Shirk. Unfortunately, not all candidates made reference to the theological significance of the second part of the Shahadah - failing to discuss Muhammad pbuh and the concept of Risalah. This also needed to be addressed to some extent if the highest level was to be awarded.

1b

This question was a fairly standard debate and should, therefore, have provoked some excellent responses. However, there was still a large number of candidates who only argued from one perspective. This prevented them from getting a Level 5 regardless of how well the response was written.

2a

This was possibly the least popular of the questions and was arguably not dealt with as well as the others. Weaker responses to the question came from candidates who primarily wrote a narrative of the Night Journey and, therefore, addressed the general topic rather than the specific question. Most responses picked up on the bolstering effect it had on Muhammad's pbuh morale in the face of some difficult personal traumas. Unfortunately, quite a few candidates failed to find any other reasons as to why it was significant for Muhammad pbuh. There were, however, a few excellent responses that showed a real appreciation for the variety of ways in which the Night Journey was significant in the life of Muhammad pbuh. These included the meeting of previous prophets and the implication of this for the concept of Risalah in Islam and the setting of the five daily prayers.

2b

This appeared to be the question candidates struggled with the most. This may possibly be because they have not encountered a similar question before and so were unprepared for the response. The weaker responses were those that completely failed to address the 'religious influences' discussing only the social influences at the time. The candidates who gained the higher levels were able to pick up on a variety of 'religious influences' to which Muhammad pbuh would have been exposed and link them with the Night Journey. Some candidates referred to meeting with the previous prophets as evidence of influences from Judaism and Christianity which were around at the time, whilst others made links with Zoroastrianism and the Arab polytheism that was prevalent.

3a

This was another popular question and most candidates had a clear knowledge of Salah. A few of the weaker responses started off mentioning Salah but then strayed onto the more general topic of the mosque and these candidates did not gain many marks. There were other candidates who wrote nice descriptive essays on prayer but failed to discuss the significance of the preparations and movements of prayer. These gained similarly low grades. The best responses came from candidates who were not sidetracked into too much narrative writing. The majority of candidates made reference to Wudu preparations and its significance alongside one or two of the movements, however, the best candidates were able to show a much wider variety of ways of preparing for, and the movements of, the prayer ritual. These included things like Niyah, prostration and the concept of Ummah.

3b

On the whole this was a well answered question. Most candidates were able to discuss the importance of Niyah within Islam with a large number linking it to the Five Pillars and the Shahadah as the only non-action Pillar. The majority of candidates seemed to come to the same conclusion which was that both intention and action are equally important. This conclusion tended to be based on the same argument - that the Five Pillars are a combination of both intention and action and are all important, which means there can be no difference in the level of importance generally. The best responses came from candidates who were able to offer more original arguments.

4a

This question required candidates to explain what Surah 96 revealed about the revelation and knowledge of Allah. The weaker candidates wrote in very general terms about the contents of the Surah and seemed to indicate a lack of any in-depth knowledge of it. There were several responses of this nature and these were awarded no higher than Level 2 because the knowledge demonstrated was so minimal. There were, however, a large number of candidates who clearly knew the Surah and its contents. Quite a few of these only really focused on the knowledge of Allah gained from the Surah but did not really mention what it tells us about the revelation. The response needed to show both in order to gain the highest level.

4b

As with question 1 b), this was a fairly standard debate with which all candidates ought to be familiar. As such, it should have provided them with the opportunity to do some excellent evaluations. Disappointingly, there were not as many high level responses as would be expected for this type of question. Most candidates were able to discuss the question in relation to previous revelations and the Qur'an as a completed but not new revelation; however, quite a few did little else. The better candidates were also able to introduce a number of salient points in order to argue for it as a new revelation. For example, a few discussed the idea that although it was not completely new in the context of Arab polytheism, many aspects of the message would have been new to a large sector of the society in which Muhammad pbuh lived.

G579 Judaism (AS)

General Comments:

It was clear that students had been well prepared for this examination and many responses demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of relevant subject matter. Those who did not do so well often addressed the topic in general rather than the particular question set, and introduced material with less discrimination, at times, with a box-ticking mentality.

When writing down the answer, it is important that candidates remember that there are no marks for evaluative material in AO1 responses, where the focus is on knowledge with understanding; however, in AO2 responses, evaluation is essential for good marks.

Overall, standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar were good, although some candidates had problems with paragraphing, and nearly all answers were of a sensible length. Some scripts were barely legible, and Centres might be mindful of this when considering candidates for access arrangements. There were no rubric errors.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 a

Most candidates began the response with discussion of the origins and transmission of the Oral Law, many citing the Mishnaic tractate *Avot* as a proof text. Some had very good knowledge of tannaim involved in Mishnah redaction, and nearly all cited Rabbi Judah the Prince as the scholar responsible for the final editing of the work. Several candidates confused the terms *tannaim* and *amoraim*. Most candidates had a sound grasp of the historical circumstances surrounding the decision to write down the Oral Law, and some included good discussion of the need to standardise the Law. Nearly all candidates showed some awareness of the contents of the Mishnah.

1 b

Many candidates drew on evidence given in the first part of the question and argued that the Oral Law has the same authority as the Written Law. Some argued that without the Oral Law it would be impossible to obey the Written Law since most of the details of its observance are not given in the Torah. Only a handful of candidates supposed that the second written text cast a shadow on the authority of the Torah.

2 a

Most candidates showed good awareness of the laws concerning menstrual defilement and the use of the mikveh as the Jewish rite of purification; some included discussion of the use of the mikveh by men. There was much good discussion of the laws of family purity as the key to marital happiness. Some explained that many non-Orthodox Jews have abandoned the practices of ritual impurity.

2 b

There were some thoughtful responses to this question. Some argued that the purity laws alienate a menstruating woman from those around her, and can make her feel inferior about the natural processes of her body. However, the majority opinion was that the laws enhance the marriage relationship, and ensure that it is one of mutual love and respect.

3 a

Most candidates understood the term halakhah in terms of Jewish law and practice; some located halakhah's origins to the revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai. In the best responses, candidates began by explaining the Hebrew root of the word halakhah (literally, 'to go'), and then discussed how the tradition directs Jews to go about their lives in obedience to the Law of G-d. Nearly all candidates discussed the practical application of one or more of Judaism's ritual and ethical teachings.

3 b

Most candidates pointed out that not all Jews keep the religious rules; a typical example given was that while some Jews may keep kosher at home, they might not while dining out or at someone else's home. Some candidates argued the primacy of moral commands over ritual practices. Others argued that the religious rules were given by G-d and are therefore eternally binding: men and women are not justified in eliminating what no longer suits them.

4 a

Most candidates located the origins of the 'chosen people' concept to G-d's covenants with Abraham and Moses. Many included discussion of the rabbinic idea that G-d offered the Torah to all the nations but only the Jews accepted it. In the best responses, candidates focused discussion on how the covenants obligated the Jews to worship and obey G-d by following the mitzvot. Some explained that G-d's choice of the Jews was not made on the grounds of Israel's merits.

4 b

Most candidates disagreed with the statement in the question and argued that the 'chosen people' concept has nothing to do with notions of elitism: G-d chose the Jews for specific tasks and with specific responsibilities; they were chosen for the benefit of all humankind. Others accepted what they perceived as the logic of the statement: to make a choice is inevitably to favour one out of many.

G581 Philosophy of Religion (A2)

General Comments:

There were some very good scripts this year, but many candidates failed to do justice to their abilities through not reading the question as set, especially in Questions 3 and 4. Good responses work to establish relevance – it should be clear to the examiner *why* a particular point has been made. A significant number of essays read simply as unconnected lists of facts learned, without any demonstration of why the points mentioned might be significant. Better candidates clearly *reflected* on issues, rather than simply learning them, often demonstrating thoughtful insights. In doing so, they were able to construct effective arguments. Less focused responses tended simply to outline theories, with a few generalised assertions in the final paragraph. There were also issues of faulty and imprecise understanding of philosophical theories, especially in Questions 1 and 3.

Some candidates handicapped themselves by very poor use of English: muddled expression too often points to, and creates, muddled thought. Inadequate grasp of the grammar of philosophy, with terms such as ‘prove’ (used as a synonym for ‘argue’), ‘refute’ (used to mean ‘deny’), *a priori* (often mistakenly used for ‘innate’), *a posteriori*, ‘cognitive’, ‘noncognitive’, ‘propositional’, ‘non-propositional’, ‘antireal’, ‘logical’, ‘coherent’, ‘analytic’ and ‘metaphysical’ were commonly misunderstood. The failure to grasp the underlying meaning of philosophical terms led to evident misunderstandings, especially in Questions 1 and 3. This is an examination in philosophy, and understanding the conventions of the subject is as basic as understanding the meaning of gravity in physics.

Some candidates continue to penalise themselves by writing illegibly. Examiners can reward only what they are able to read.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

AO1

This was a very popular question, but sometimes poorly done. Many responses either knew myth or symbol well and thus answers were weighted towards one or the other. Those who could explain both elements accurately showed a solid understanding of the concepts, often using examples of biblical myths such as the Creation story with some referring to Jesus’ incarnation and resurrection as myth. A number of good responses were able to contrast and evaluate both myths and symbols. The majority of these responses were able to place the discussion in relation to the respective theorists (Bultmann and Tillich) in a secure way. There were some candidates who handled Bultmann’s demythologisation and the need to reveal Kerygma particularly well. Some candidates took the path of linking Aquinas and analogy and the *via negativa* although this proved dangerous territory as they frequently wandered off the question. Others discussed the similarities between myth and symbols e.g. connected with culture and thus subject to change or ‘misinterpretation’. Weaker answers covered several theories of religious language before arriving at an unsupported assertion that *via negativa* or language games was better than both symbol and myth. Bultman was sometimes inaccurately used as a supporter of myth, rather than as a critic, although several candidates used his ideas of demythologisation and those of D.Jenkins to good effect. Tillich was often cited in relation to symbol though only stronger answers demonstrated a depth of knowledge of symbols participating in that to which they point, the ground of being, with some utilising Randall’s ideas of non-cognitive symbolic language being similar to the responses evoked by music and art.

AO2

In their evaluations, weaker candidates failed to notice the element of comparison in the questions and either listed a solitary strength or weakness of myth and/or symbol, or simply assessed each in turn. A few went further and offered either one or several alternative types of religious language as being better to talk about God, which was not required or desired and thus were rewarded accordingly. The best responses compared myth and symbol throughout, noting shared strengths and weaknesses, such as the subjectivity involved or openness to interpretation, as well as commenting on their differences, finally drawing the material to an appropriate conclusion. Some responses chose to deal with myth followed by symbol, for example, and then compare in the assessment. Both approaches could be successful, as long as the AO2 requirement was not forgotten due to time pressure.

Question 2

AO1

There were some excellent responses to this question where the focus remained on Hick and Plato. Most pointed out the differences in approach from soft materialist to dualist. Plato's distinction of body and soul was generally understood better, with most answers including how Plato described body (material, mutable, mortal) and soul (immaterial, eternal, immutable) in relation to the Realm of the Forms. Many included Plato's arguments from knowledge, opposites and equals to support his view and several knew of the Charioteer analogy – although it was not always described accurately in terms of the tripartite soul with reason (charioteer) steering the two horses of spirit and desire. Many good answers explained Hick's understanding of the body/soul as a psycho-physical unity illustrating with the example of SOS – save our souls - which means save me, the whole person not just an immaterial substance! Most responses took John Smith on many and varied journeys around the world or indeed into the multiverse (!) and to some extent could recount Hick's thought experiment, Replica Theory. The best answers related this clearly to body/soul distinction and why both body and soul were required, linking it successfully to the Christian doctrine of resurrection (e.g. St Paul's writing to the Corinthians). A few were aware that Hick considered Replica Theory to be a failed thought experiment.

AO2

There were many good attempts to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each thinker, often using others, such as Ryle, Geach and Dawkins to explore the validity of dualism. There was good consideration from some candidates of the issues of continuity and identity. Most candidates successfully used afterlife material to return to the specific question about the body-soul distinction. A number of candidates seem to have misread the questions as "critically compare"; although this allowed some valid points to be raised in terms of Hick and Plato, this approach sometimes took the response away from the focus of critical assessment. Some less successful responses, focused more on afterlife of both Plato and Hick rather than the body/soul distinction, thus analysis tended to be more implicit at times. Most responses attacked both theories for their lack of empirical support using Aristotle, Dawkins, and sometimes Ryle as support.

Question 3

AO1

This was the least popular question, but was answered effectively by some candidates who were clear on the concept of numinosity. Some candidates simply asserted that numinous experiences reveal the wonder of the divine before moving on to discuss a range of different types of religious experience, with varying amounts of comparison. Many candidates referenced Otto and his view that numinous experience is at the core of religion as well as his notions that the 'numinous' experience has two aspects: *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans*.

Some candidates understood the idea that when encountering God, Otto says that we feel as a 'creature abased'. More holistic answers articulated analysis in relation to James although this could be hit and miss depending on how it was tied in. Some candidates seemed to take the word numinous to mean religious and thus wrote general experience answers which used the word numinous throughout but didn't really understand it.

AO2

Where responses focused on the question, the analysis was given with relevance and insight, coherently comparing one or more types of religious experience with the numinous, pointing out similarities and differences and assessing the extent to which God was revealed. There was divergence of opinion as to whether Buber supported or criticised Otto with his insistence on the I-Thou relationship. Less successful answers merely listed various types of religious experience and scripture, sometimes relating them to revelation but with no comparison to the numinous – such answers were clearly not answering the whole of the question. Some of the better answers focused on utilising general critique to assess the numinous, such as physiology, psychology and James' criteria or chose to contrast with one other approach, usually scripture or corporate religious experiences.

Question 4

AO1

This was a very popular question that sadly produced the greatest number of low marks because the word 'biblical' was often overlooked. Indeed, a significant number of candidates in writing out the statement for discussion, perhaps in their introduction or in their conclusion, simply missed out the word and thus changed the question. The strongest responses clearly had a range of concrete examples of biblical miracles that they could apply to the various issues raised, for example the problem of evil, the point of petitionary prayer, the partisan or arbitrary nature of God. Some answers included the issues of biblical miracles being in a pre-scientific age and questions of interpretation, including Bultman's attempts to demythologise New Testament miracles and Tillich's understanding of the miracles as a sign. Many raised questions of the issue of omniscience and free-will, as well as the problem of understanding God as eternal versus the biblical concept of an interventionist God. Most answers raised the issue of the violation of natural laws, more general topic responses choosing to focus on Hume's definition and arguments without reference to the biblical concept of miracles. However, there were some very good answers that clearly linked a number of Hume's arguments to biblical miracles, for example the issue relating the biblical authors to Hume's ideas of no sane, educated witnesses who came from barbarous nations. General topic responses tended to expound at length the "everything I know" answer covering Hume, Holland and others.

AO2

Many candidates understood that you can define miracles in a range of ways and they each lead to slightly different approaches to the philosophy of the topic, although some did not quite understand the force of Holland's train driver story, and some, after stating that Aquinas emphasised the revelatory nature of miracles, proceeded to treat Aquinas with a Humean approach. The standard of evaluation was dependent on how well the candidate chose to answer this specific question, rather than the general miracle pre-prepared answer. Hume and Holland were often juxtaposed as an alternative view but with no reference to biblical miracles, this was often tenuous. However, there were some excellent examples, using a range of scholars depending on the issue being discussed. For example, the issue of the problem of evil was often assessed in terms of the theodicies of Irenaeus and Augustine or Wiles was assessed using Swinburne and Ward. Boethius' ideas cropped up in a few of the better answers in a discussion of whether an eternal God matched with the biblical concept of an imminent God who acted in the world.

G582 Religious Ethics (A2)

General Comments

Some candidates wrote well-balanced responses demonstrating pleasing levels of exemplification and explanation alongside pleasing attempts at juxtaposition of concepts leading to sound evaluation and subsequent justification of conclusions.

The most popular question was Question 1, followed by Questions 2 and 3. With regard to Question 4, the majority of these essays tended to be towards the weaker end of the spectrum. Centres might be encouraged to assist students in focusing on being able to make connections between different parts of the specification e.g. Business Ethics and Religious Ethics or to make connections within one part e.g. Utilitarianism and sexual ethics.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This was the most popular question. Some candidates were able to engage fully with the question by first of all giving some space to discuss the key word in the question, 'vital'. They were then able to demonstrate a wide range of knowledge covering figures such as Aquinas, Butler and Newman from the religious perspective to Freud, Piaget and Fromm from the secular perspective. In general, with regard to Aquinas, candidates were able to distinguish the concepts of 'conscientia' and 'synderesis' and were also able to write about conscience viewed as 'recta ratio'. Candidates might be encouraged to develop a more holistic understanding of the Thomist concepts by linking these concepts with an understanding of Natural Law and the development within a person of the virtues. Candidates might also be encouraged to be more nuanced with regard to the distinctions between Butler and Newman and their views on conscience. There was a tendency to conflate the two so that together they simply presented the idea that conscience was the magisterial voice of God. A number of candidates showed detailed knowledge of Freud, Piaget and Fromm but seemed less secure in establishing the implications of their ideas on what constitutes conscience and whether it could be regarded as being 'vital'.

Some candidates wrote everything they knew about conscience with little relation to the question, or wrote about the 'vitality' of the conscience rather than whether the conscience was 'vital'.

Question 2

This was the third most popular question. Some candidates were able to engage fully with the question by giving at least some consideration to the key words in the question 'of no use'. They were then able to demonstrate a wide range of knowledge covering Bentham, Mill and Singer. The application of their ideas to issues such as contraception, pre-marital and extra-marital sex and to homosexuality was dealt with well by some candidates, whereas other responses simply applied Utilitarianism without considering its usefulness or otherwise.

Some candidates seemed less sure of the content of sexual ethics and, for example, wrote about abortion or the right to a child. Candidates might be encouraged to avoid juxtaposition of alternative ethical theories before having demonstrated clearly their knowledge and understanding of the ethical theory in the actual question.

Some candidates were unable to apply specific teaching with regard to sexual ethics from Natural Law, Kant and religious ethics. Instead general principles as covered for the AS were applied. Some candidates showed a limited understanding of Utilitarianism beyond its aiming for the greatest good for the greatest number. This prevented them from writing nuanced answers of sufficient depth. Candidates should be encouraged to be more creative with regard to exemplification. Too many responses confined themselves to application of Bentham and Mill to 'gang rape' which again limited the development of a sophisticated response to the question. Candidates might also be encouraged to develop their understanding of Singer particularly given the amount of material that is now readily available regarding his views. Simply stating that he believed that everyone's preferences should be met does not provide a solid platform for discussion.

There were, however, some good discussions of Mill's harm principle and the ideas of libertarianism, and better responses were able to draw on Mill's support for contraception and Bentham's writing on 'pederasty' and the issue of consent.

Question 3

This was the second most popular question. Some candidates were again able to engage fully with the question by keeping their focus on the key words 'upbringing and social conditioning'. They were then able to demonstrate a pleasing level of knowledge and understanding in showing how a wide variety of concepts and views might be applied to the issue. It was pleasing to read responses which showed detailed knowledge of Skinner and Watson. Some candidates were thus able to discuss the implications of, for example, the 'Little Albert' experiment with regard to moral choices in later life.

Candidates might be encouraged with this type of question to avoid attempting too comprehensive a response. Given the time constraints of the examination, it is unfeasible for candidates to write everything they know about Hard Determinism, Soft Determinism, Libertarianism and how this might apply to the question. Thus some responses attempted to present the whole topic from the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle through to Calvin's Predestination and Sartre's 'mauvaise foi'. Selection of material is an important skill which candidates might benefit from attending to more fully. Candidates might also be encouraged to be more nuanced in their responses e.g. how Pavlov's Dog and the salivation experiment demonstrated classical conditioning which might then have implications in understanding the impact of upbringing and social conditioning. Candidates might also be encouraged to gain a better and more critical understanding of the summation argument of Clarence Darrow in the Leopold and Loeb Case of 1924.

With this question, some candidates limited themselves to rehearsing a well-learned and standard 'Free Will vs. Determinism' essay. This again did not enable them to answer the question. Few candidates explored what is meant by 'free', but some were able to explain Locke's distinction between liberty of spontaneity and hypothetical liberty within the context of the locked room and the link to Hume's views.

Question 4

This was the least popular question. Amongst the most successful responses were those which kept their focus on the key words 'religious moral duty' and putting 'employees first'. Application of religious ethics from the Christian standpoint was attempted by many with reference to biblical teaching, Natural Law and Situation Ethics. Some candidates were limited by ignoring – more or less completely – the word 'religious'. Such responses were confined to explaining the responses of different ethical theories to employees. Here, the general level of knowledge candidates displayed regarding Business Ethics was not particularly high. Some candidates wrote very briefly about religion and business before applying other ethical theories. Here again, candidates might benefit from thinking more carefully about the importance of avoiding

juxtaposition of alternative ethical theories before having demonstrated clearly their knowledge and understanding of the ethical theory highlighted by the question. Some candidates were able to show good levels of exemplification and this was encouraging. A number, for example, focused well on the Rana Plaza disaster in Dhaka, Bangladesh and the religious moral duty which employers should have towards their employees based on beliefs such as the presumed equality of humankind if created by a deity, the sanctity of life accorded all human life without exception, and religious teachings in holy texts which refer to the need for honesty and justice.

Many responses focused on the question of profits and some went on to consider the environment, but this was not always directly related to the specific question.

G583 Jewish Scriptures (A2)

General Comments:

There were a number of excellent answers in which candidates demonstrated thorough knowledge of the text and their ability to make close reference to it, often in the form of quotation. In a few instances, the quality of response moved well beyond the confines of A level in terms of breadth as well as depth. At the lower end of the mark range there was less discrimination and direction to the question with some candidates adopting a write-all-you-know approach.

Rubric errors were rare and only in a few instances did miscalculation of time result in uneven answers. There were several instances in which candidates failed to identify the question being answered.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

AO1

Most candidates began the response by outlining their understanding of the nature and function of a prophet, generally conceived as one who both foretells future events and delivers G-d's message to the people. Some candidates had good knowledge of Amos as the first of the canonical prophets of the Jewish Scriptures. Many candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of the historical background to the northern kingdom of Israel in the mid 8th century BCE and commented at length on the religious, political and social conditions of the day. Much discussion focused on Amos' proclamations of judgement on Israel's neighbours for idolatry and on Israel itself for social injustices and ethical immorality. Most candidates drew attention to the promises of restoration in Chapter 9, some explaining that the passages may be subject to literary uncertainty.

AO2

Most candidates selected texts to address the question from the outset of the response; others drew the points together in a conclusion. The majority opinion was that Amos deserved the doleful title; others were less convinced and several argued that Amos should be known as the prophet of justice because of his insistence that G-d demanded justice for all. Some argued that the concluding passages lighten the book so Amos' message is not all doom and gloom.

Question 2

AO1

Most candidates began by outlining their understanding of the term 'Messiah'; some provided an outline summary of the contexts of Isaiah 40-43 and the book of Micah, including time, place, and the prevailing political and religious conditions. In the best responses, candidates demonstrated detailed knowledge of the set texts and wrote with confidence on the Messianic themes in both works in equal measure. Weaker responses tended to focus almost exclusively on the set passages from Isaiah. Much discussion centred on the themes of eschatological deliverance and salvation in Isaiah, and the message of hope in Micah.

AO2

The best analysis came from those candidates who used the texts to identify both common themes and striking differences in the passages. Some argued the positive visions in both texts for the future restoration of the people to their homeland. Some argued the absence of themes of judgement and punishment in Isaiah 40-43, and the teaching centred on a Messiah, son of David, in Micah. Several candidates argued that social morality was by far the dominant theme in the book of Micah.

Question 3

AO1

Most candidates began the response by explaining that the opening title ascribes the book of Proverbs to King Solomon; several candidates demonstrated knowledge and understanding of Solomon's reputation for wisdom. Some explained that Proverbs shares some of the characteristics of Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. Many candidates concentrated discussion on the contents of the set texts and explained the variety of the teachings, including poems about personified Wisdom and the moral admonitions of a father to his child. Nearly all candidates explained that 'true wisdom' in the texts is associated with the *fear* of G-d; 'fear' was generally understood in the sense of 'awe'.

AO2

In their exegesis of the set passages, several candidates discussed whether the texts reflect a Jewish milieu. Some followed Rashi's teaching that the good woman is an allusion to the Torah. Others argued that the book represents a compilation of various collections of proverbs, arising out of different times and different places.

Question 4

AO1

Most candidates began the response by providing an outline summary of reward and punishment in the Jewish Scriptures: G-d rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those who intentionally transgress them. Nearly all candidates focused discussion on the set texts itemised in the specification: Isaiah 53, Jeremiah 7, Ezekiel 18, Daniel 12, Psalm 1, and 2, and Maccabees 7; some made good reference to other set texts from the course, and this was entirely acceptable. The majority of candidates worked through the texts in turn and explained teachings relevant to the question; others preferred to identify and follow particular themes, such as personal and corporate responsibility.

AO2

Those candidates with detailed knowledge of the set texts offered well-argued responses; those with limited knowledge of the set texts often did not really begin to construct an argument, though individual points were frequently valid. Most responses emphasised the development in belief about rewards and punishments; notably, post-Exilic teachings concerning personal rather than corporate responsibility, and teachings about the resurrection of the body. Some argued that while there is development in the doctrine, much is often left ambiguous and open to interpretation.

G584 New Testament (A2)

General Comments:

In general the standard was pleasing and most candidates attempted to answer the actual questions rather than address the general topics.

It was good to see the set texts being used to inform and develop arguments but there were some inaccuracies when specific quotations were given and the interpretation of key stories was sometimes rather one dimensional; candidates should be encouraged to explore their ambiguity and the diversity of their interpretations.

It was also good to see many essays 'peppered' with reference to contemporary scholarship; however, there were many inaccuracies and much speculation here with a number of candidates clearly knowing the names of the scholars but not their ideas.

Some handwriting proved difficult to decipher.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This was a very popular question. Many candidates worked through key miracles and explained what they revealed about Jesus' identity. Some ably pointed out the miracles' lack of clarity (e.g. the Feeding of the 5000 may show Jesus to be hosting the Messianic banquet or just as a greater prophet in the mould of Elisha) and related Jesus' actions to other first century miracle workers, thus arguing along with E P Sanders that the miracles show little about Jesus' identity. Some candidates thought that the titles Son of Man, Son of God and Messiah are synonymous; this is not the case.

Many candidates reflected well on the question and debated whether the miracles were the 'greatest clue' to Jesus' identity and considered other possibilities such as the parables, Sermon on the Mount or the Christological revelations in the Passion Narrative. Some made the switch to looking at non-miraculous clues too early: having considered only a couple of miracles, the rest of the essay giving a list-like account of other 'clues'. More convincing arguments kept the shift to other 'clues' until after a full consideration of the miracles.

Question 2

This was also a popular question which was well done. Candidates typically worked their way through the Sermon on the Mount discussing the ethical teaching found therein. Many candidates got 'bogged down' in the Beatitudes and did not get much further. Others gave a considered discussion of the antitheses, golden rule and other specific ethical teaching. The candidates whose discussions stood out had a clear sense of what was implied by the term 'ethics'. Some considered the Sermon on the Mount too eschatologically orientated to be truly ethical and considered Schwietzer's 'interim ethic' idea; others found no root principle there and a number debated the authenticity of the material in Matthew and questioned whether it actually went back to the historical Jesus.

Most candidates, quite legitimately, broadened out the discussion and focused on the trigger word 'key' to look at other sources for Jesus' ethics. Some mentioned the parables, particularly those in Matthew 25 and others the miracles – where they rather forced ethical teaching on to them; others looked for a clearer articulation of the love command in Matthew 22 and/or Mark 12 and the latter point led to some fruitful discussions. A number of candidates made the jump to looking for other sources of Jesus' ethics before they had properly or fully considered the Sermon on the Mount.

Question 3

A reasonably large number of candidates attempted this question and it was not done well. Although most candidates knew what the Parousia was, few were able to articulate in specific terms Luke's response. Many, quite rightly, focused on hints of a realised or inaugurated eschatology in Luke and related this to the delay of the Parousia. Some went to full blown discussion of different views of the Kingdom of G-d and some answers just petered out. Others discussed the Lost Parables in Luke 15, and a number attempted allegorical interpretations – the search for the coin or sheep was a metaphor for the quest for the Parousia – which were seldom convincing; some saw Luke anchoring forgiveness in the present and thus diminished the need for a future judgment. A number of responses gave full consideration to the Matthew 25 parables, often mistaking them for Lukan material.

Only a few candidates displayed any understanding on Conzelmann's notion of Salvation History and the Parousia being pushed into the distant future. Some did consider Luke's emphasis on prayer, the spirit and individual salvation and related them to the delay of the Parousia clearly and well.

Christopher Tuckett's *Luke* (Bloomsbury 2004) contains an excellent, short and crystal clear discussion on Luke and the Parousia.

Question 4

This question was generally well done. A few candidates misinterpreted the question and looked at Christological titles with little reference to the historical Jesus but the majority seemed happy with the focus of the title. Some candidates gave case studies ranging from the birth stories through the parables and miracles to the passion and discussed whether these stories revealed anything about the historical Jesus. Others looked at a history of the Quest; these tended to be successful when detail was given about the various methods employed and discussions ensued about their validity. The majority, however, focused on the criteria for finding the historical Jesus and this approach bore fruit. Candidates were distinguished by their ability to provide examples and evaluate the criteria and by their ability to avoid a list-like essay and provide a holistic discussion and a balanced, clear and developed conclusion.

G585 Developments in Christian Theology (A2)

General Comments:

There were, as usual, some impressively good answers which often displayed a grasp of theology well beyond A level. Good answers were usually from those who wrote less, planned carefully and set out their argument in the opening paragraph (very few defined their terms) and most importantly answered the question in the final concluding (not too long) paragraph. Too many potentially good essays were spoiled by aiming for length and not quality.

Generally, Part 2 questions were answered better than those in Part 1; the tendency in Part 1 questions was to present 'everything I know' answers, whereas Part 2 responses were more selective.

Noticeably this year, there were many more almost illegible scripts due to very poor handwriting.

A common weakness, especially of the middle to lower band candidates, was a form of argument which alternated paragraphs starting with, 'on the one hand in agreement [with the title of the essay]...', with paragraphs starting with, 'on the other hand in disagreement [with the title of the essay]...' and so on throughout the essay. Although the laudable intention is to stay focused on the question, the result is not much discussion and argument but a dizzy-making set of contradictory statements.

Finally, the past tense of seek is not 'seeked' but sought (a frequent mistake made by a significant minority of candidates).

Centres might wish to refer to the G585 teacher's notes and suggested reading and resources on the OCR website.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

Those who focused on Barth without digressing into other areas of theology often wrote theologically insightful and perspicacious essays. Many excellent answers dealt with Barth's notion of revelation, his teaching on election as expressed in the incarnation and discussed revelation as 'event'.

Although many knew about the Barth-Brunner debate, surprisingly few knew or understood the detail of the argument. Most understood that Barth was suspicious of reason because of human frailty and corruption but few developed this sufficiently to explain why he was so reluctant to accept that there could be any 'point of contact' by which humans could 'know' God.

Many thought that Barth should be termed a universalist; but there was widespread confusion as to what universalism means in eschatologically terms and more specifically by Barth himself (his views are notoriously opaque). Better candidates were able to reflect on Barth's 'friendliness of God' argument in this context.

Many seemed to be unaware of Barth's critique of religion as 'untruth'; this was a pity as it would have helped many to answer the question by considering the notion of exclusivism in relation to his notions of grace, election and incarnation.

There was a tendency by many to discuss Rahner, Hick etc as routes Barth *should* have taken; however these suggestions could only be considered relevant if they corresponded in some way to Barth's actual theology.

Question 2

This was a popular question especially for those who knew a little of everything on this part of the specification. The most common weakness was a failure to define religion and the relationship of true and True; far too many launched into an argument without considering that the question depended on making a comparison between the definition and necessary conditions of religion.

There were many excellent answers from those who selected a few areas to discuss and could do so in detail. There were, for example, some imaginative and perceptive answers considering Cupitt's notion of religion as solar language game of life (with reference to Wittgenstein).

There was widespread confusion about Feuerbach. Many considered that he had abandoned religion because he dismissed an objective God, whereas Feuerbach's project was in the main to demythologise religion and return it to its original existential place in human experience. Discussion of his projection theory was therefore only relevant when discussing true/false religion where true religion is authentic existential experience of man in a state of nature.

There was also a general lack of confidence when dealing with Smart's phenomenological approach to religion. Most could list his dimensions but fewer were clear what this demonstrated and in particular his avoidance of metaphysical truth claims. Very few candidates discussed Smart's idea of the 'focus'.

Some chose to interpret true/false to be a debate about exclusivism and pluralism. In general this approach was not successful. Very few who referred to Hick explained Hick's definition of religion as an experience of the Real and the moral (late Hick abandons 'God' as the object of religious truth).

Question 3

There were many excellent answers to this question from those who really understood the aims of secular liberal feminism of Wollstonecraft, Mill, Taylor and modern equality feminists and were able to consider whether the Bible/Christian tradition could re-work its patriarchy sufficiently to respond to the critique of Christianity. Many candidates chose to discuss Elizabeth Cady Stanton in this context and demonstrated a very good understanding of her theological and political aims.

Many excellent answers considered Daly's critique as evidence that Christianity is unable to meet the challenge of secular feminism. There were a few excellent answers which considered the shortcomings of liberal secular feminism compared to the more satisfactory theological feminist notion of spiritual wholeness/liberty represented by Christ (Letty Russell).

A sizeable minority of weaker candidates were unable to distinguish between secular and theological feminism or philosophers and theologians.

Many candidates chose to discuss Fiorenza's reconstructionist theology but some were not clear about her hermeneutics of remembrance and how it could challenge the issues raised by liberal secular feminists' rejection of the Bible.

Finally, there are still too many candidates who think that Hampson *supports* the so-called golden thread biblical argument when in fact she uses the phrase ironically.

Question 4

Those who knew what androgyny meant often wrote extremely well and covered a wide range of ideas. Many candidates explored the androgyny of God and some considered the Trinity as a quintessential paradigm of male/female relationships.

Many made excellent use of *Mullieris Dignatem* and the arguments of Cahill, Daly, Ruether (note spelling) and Pagels. The range of ideas was impressive - some candidates analysed the sex/gender/sexuality relationship using the ideas of Foucault and Judith Butler. Candidates often had detailed and subtle knowledge of Julian of Norwich and discussed the legitimacy of Christian gnostic androgyny. It was very good to see how many candidates were willing to think on their feet rather than reproduce pre-prepared essays.

Weaker answers usually floundered over the meaning of androgyny and took it to mean just male-female equality. Consequently, essays failed to understand the nuances of the question and could only discuss the general issues.

Only a few very good answers suggested that androgyny could have a variety of meanings; those who did were able to point out how the Christian tradition has given seemingly contradictory responses depending on which meaning is used.

G586 Buddhism (A2)

General Comments:

Candidates seemed to be well prepared for the exam. There were very many candidates who fully engaged with the demands of the questions and demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of Buddhism and Buddhist concepts. Knowledge of Tibetan, Zen and Pure Land Buddhism was particularly strong and centres should be congratulated on the depth of knowledge they have helped candidates to develop.

Questions 1 and 4 were by far the most popular and candidates showed an ability to compare and contrast different schools of Buddhism. There was also an understanding of the place of scripture in different traditions which some candidates made very good use of in their discussions for question 4.

Question 2 was the next most popular and again many candidates showed a good understanding of these concepts and how they link with other Buddhist ideas. Some did however, miss the specific ethical content asked for in the question - however, this was sufficiently implicit in many responses so as not to adversely affect marks. When candidates did make these links their responses did attract higher marks.

Question 3 was either very well done by candidates who wrote very knowledgeably or responses were very general in nature and lacking in specific detail.

There have been two questions on Western Buddhism in the last two years and although they are different, this area of the specification has been well covered by questions. This question (Q3) has been misunderstood by many candidates and this misunderstanding was commented upon in the mark scheme which stated that "The question is asking whether or not the adaptations that have been made in the west have made Buddhism harder to follow. The question does not ask if the adaptations have made the adapted Buddhism hard to follow." However, this is how some of the students have read the question but they have not been penalized for this interpretation, in fact this produced some very good responses and forced candidates to really pick apart western adaptations of Buddhism.

Centres and candidates must note that answering the question set and giving examples/ making detailed links between concepts/ showing understanding will always attract the higher marks.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1:

Better answers understood Tibetan Buddhism's historical origins and were therefore able to see how it had developed its own distinctive Mahayanan path by adapting existing tantric practices. Weaker responses referred to the Dalai Lama but were not able to say what makes his position in Buddhism unique (with reference to trulkus). Some very good answers could explain how the Book of the Dead offered a distinctive insight of death and the bardo and samsara and the very best answers contrasted Vajrayanan with Theravadan practices. Candidates demonstrated some excellent understanding of the internal similarities between different Mahayna traditions and most made good use of the similarities and differences between Tibetan, Zen and Pure Land Buddhism.

Question 2:

Many candidates had a very vague idea of compassion and did not give the mother/child example of karuna which would have made a significant difference to the marks their responses attracted. Similarly very few referred to the other paramitas notably metta and absence of karuna. Better answers could discuss wisdom (panna) by trying to pin down what right 'understanding' and 'intention' actually mean in relationship to upaya/sila etc. Excellent answers discussed the Heart Sutra's notion of sunyata as the heart of wisdom without the requirement for karuna.

Question 3:

This was a demanding question and not popular with candidates. There were however some good answers which considered the effects of science, modernity, atheism on western Buddhism and whether adaptations were undermining traditional Buddhism.

Question 4:

This was a popular question, however many failed to define meditation and discuss what is/is not meditation. Candidates could have made more of the differences between lay/ordained practices. Better answers discussed western/European popularity of meditation and its use outside of Buddhism. There was however, some confusion about Zen practices and what is/is not meditation but Pure Land practices were often discussed. There was some discussion of what practices might be more important than meditation and this was taken from a range of traditions such as lay Buddhists giving alms to the monastic sangha, following the eightfold path and developing wisdom or overcoming the three fires.

G587 Hinduism (A2)

General Comments:

The entry was very small and generally at the higher end of the ability range. There were no wholly blank scripts and no rubric errors.

All questions were attempted, with Question 4 being the least popular.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This was generally a well answered question. No candidates mixed up the meaning of the key terms and the evaluative element of relative importance was generally engaged with; the top level candidates were able to address the ambiguity of the status of some scriptures and the reasons for this, but candidates at all levels were able to discuss the different forms of importance found in concepts of divine revelation as opposed that given to accessible texts which are in everyday use.

Question 2

Candidates clearly found this question unexpected, and they understood it as asking whether the Bhagavad Gita says less about the nature of God than it does about other concepts. Most candidates found plenty to say on this interpretation though, and were able to consider the question analytically.

Question 3

Most candidates understood the idea of a 'unifying feature' to mean something that all Hindus believe in and/or find important, and they used this to measure the concept of moksha against others such as a varnashramadharma. Most candidates did this reasonably well, but there were some who chose more complex and/or obscure concepts than moksha to support an argument that most Hindus would not know about moksha, and this led to confused responses.

Question 4

This was the least popular question; the term 'coherent' caused some confusion – those candidates who did attempt this question tended to describe both the Vishistadvaita and the Advaita and then conclude that one was harder to understand than the other and so must therefore be less coherent.

G588 Islam (A2)

General Comments

The general level of response this year was similar to that of last year's paper, with the majority of candidates gaining Level 3 or 4 with a few below and a few above this standard. Whilst it is fair to say that most candidates had a sound knowledge of the topics they addressed, only a small proportion displayed the depth of knowledge and level of evaluative skills required of an A*/A grade student. Candidates need to look beyond the most obvious responses in order to show they are truly engaging with the question.

Questions 1 and 3 seemed to be the most popular, although a significant number of candidates still answered Question 4. Question 2 was the least popular and was also probably not answered as well as the others.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

AO1

This was probably the most popular question overall. Most candidates provided sound responses outlining the Articles of Belief, however, some were far more detailed than others. The weaker candidates were those who either failed to discuss all of the Articles of Faith or those who showed little sign of evaluation. The better responses demonstrated not only a good knowledge of the Articles of Faith but also of the variety of religious and social beliefs that were in existence and could be used as an argument for the Articles as not being new.

AO2

The level of evaluation for this question was variable. The majority of responses argued for the Articles of Faith as pre-existing in some form and so not being entirely new. Evidence used to back this view up included previous messages and prophets and focused primarily on Christian and Jewish influences. A large number of candidates were also able to illustrate how the Articles could be seen to be new to some extent. However, the variety of evidence used to back this up was fairly limited.

Question 2

AO1

This appeared to be the least popular question. Unfortunately, many students chose to illustrate the differences between Sunni, Shi'a and Sufi in general terms rather than fully focusing on the validity of the Sunnah and the authenticity and interpretation of the Hadiths. This obviously limited them to a Level 2 on the 'general topic' or at best a low Level 3. Quite a few candidates who did address the question directly seemed to have a fairly superficial knowledge of the Sunnah and the process of authentication. Some also failed to mention the role of the Sunnah within the different law schools and this is obviously an important aspect when it comes to discussing the status of the Sunnah. There were also some candidates who did not really address the question of the origins of the Sunnah and focused solely on its status.

AO2

Due to the lack of knowledge amongst many candidates on the role of the Sunnah within the law schools and the process of authentication of the Hadiths, the evaluative element of this question was not fully demonstrated by many. There were, however, a few responses that gained a Level 5. These were generally the candidates who fully appreciated that, whilst all Muslims view Muhammad pbuh as fundamentally important, responses to the question of the origins and status of the Sunnah varied considerably in some cases.

Question 3

AO1

Alongside Question 4, this shared second place for the most popular question. This question prompted a range of responses with candidates outlining the achievements and the failures of the first four Khalifahs with varying degrees of accuracy and detail with, for most, Uthman as the main focus of discussion. Most of the candidates mentioned the compilation of the Qur'an as Uthman's biggest contribution to the spread of Islam and his tendency to practise nepotism as his biggest failure. Knowledge of other achievements/failures of his varied with many responses including little else. The best responses showed extensive knowledge of all four Khalifahs but were able to discuss these without including too much narrative.

AO2

A large proportion of the responses lacked in depth evaluation. Some of the more developed responses highlighted that all the Khalifahs were equal in their contribution to Islam or noted that the Shi'a split in Islam could be apportioned to either Uthman, indirectly and/or, in most cases Ali, whose contribution had a negative impact on the spread of Islam, therefore concluding that Ali was the least successful Khalifah. Uthman's compilation of the Qur'an was seen by the majority of candidates as so important to Islam that for this reason alone it is hard to see him as the least significant of the Khalifahs.

Question 4

AO1

There was a variety of responses with quite a few answers on the subject of Sharia law generally showing little knowledge of those elements relating specifically to family and the roles of men and women. These candidates obviously limited the number of marks they could achieve due to this lack of knowledge. There were, however, many responses that showed at least a reasonable knowledge of those parts of the Sharia that were directly relevant. Among the examples highlighted were laws relating to divorce, the treatment of orphans, inheritance laws and punishments/evidence for crimes such as adultery.

AO2

Quite a few candidates used the examples of the role of men and women in the Qur'an to highlight the differences between pre and post-Jahiliyah as a positive basis for the better treatment of women and the basis for family values. Also many candidates addressed the negative and positive issues of Sharia law in the context of modern society and the implications of this for family life and the role of men and women. While some of the evaluative responses for this question were just satisfactory, there were some extremely eloquent arguments worthy of a Level 5.

G589 Judaism (A2)

General Comments:

Most answers were competent with candidates able to deploy well-understood material to construct reasoned arguments. At the lower end of the mark range, candidates frequently failed to focus on the questions before them, and often did not provide effective illustrations of their points. Some were overly reliant on pre-prepared answers that did not fit the questions set. While it is vital that candidates come well prepared to the examination, they must approach it with an open mind and respond to the precise questions they find there.

Most candidates used their time well; a minority rushed the second question or left it incomplete. Spelling, punctuation and grammar were generally good, although several candidates needed to be more aware of the importance of writing legibly.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

AO1

Nearly all candidates began the response by outlining their understanding of the term 'Messianic age.' Most candidates demonstrated very good understanding of how Orthodoxy reflects the hope for this perfected age through its teachings concerning a personal Messiah. A minority of candidates showed little awareness of how Progressive Judaism anticipated the Messianic age and often did no more than declare that Progressive Jews reject the concept of a Messiah. Several candidates included discussion of the expectation within Lubavitch Hasidism of the imminent advent of the Messiah.

AO2

The best responses came from candidates who focused on the words 'more convincing' in the question. Many wondered whether the notion of one person exercising dominion over all humanity appealed to the modern democratic spirit. Some argued that Orthodox teachings were in accord with the Torah and traditional belief. Others argued that while Progressive Judaism rejects the doctrine of a personal Messiah, it still has significant elements in common with Orthodoxy, notably, faith in a redeemed world of peace and justice.

Question 2.

AO1

Most candidates began by outlining their understanding of the terms 'anti-Semitism' and 'anti-Zionism' in the question. Many focused discussion on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the rise in anti-Semitic attacks and propaganda in various countries in recent decades. Nearly all candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of the belief of a minority of Orthodox Jews (most identified Neturei Karta) that the return to sovereignty in 1948 was an abomination. Weaker responses tended to explain the historical development of anti-Semitism and modern Zionism.

AO2

Many candidates disagreed with the statement in the question, arguing that it is wrong automatically to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism because some religious Jews are themselves opposed to the existence of the State of Israel. Some argued that it is perfectly possible to be a critic of Israeli policies without being hostile to all Jews. Others argued that in much the same way as Jews were once vilified, so today the State of Israel is vilified.

Question 3

AO1

Most candidates began by outlining their understanding of the concept of 'exile' in the Jewish tradition; some explained that the majority of today's Jews live in Israel and the United States. Most candidates discussed the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the present day State of Israel, and several emphasised the plight of Jewish Displaced Persons after the Holocaust; some included useful discussion of the Law of Return. In nearly all responses, discussion focused on the views of Zionists and anti-Zionists in equal measure, and some candidates included excellent discussion of the views of Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum (the Satmar Rebbe) concerning the Three Oaths.

AO2

The majority opinion was that Jews remain in exile; that only when the Messiah arrives will exile be brought to an end. Others argued that the establishment of the present day State of Israel was not the end of exile but, rather, the signal that exile will soon be over. Some argued that the establishment of the Jewish state did indeed mark the end of exile for Jews because only in Israel could Jews live securely.

Question 4

AO1

The question elicited a variety of responses. Some concentrated discussion on the problems of maintaining Jewish identity while living in a liberal democracy. Some focused on the religious divides within the Jewish community, and the issue of 'Who is a Jew?' Some discussed efforts to strengthen Jewish identity; notably, the missionary endeavours of the Lubavitch movement. Nearly all candidates included discussion on the difficulty of maintaining belief in G-d post-Holocaust.

AO2

In their evaluation, most candidates argued that 21st century Jews face the increasing secularisation of Jewish identity. Some argued the increasing rate of intermarriage among Jews in the Diaspora. Some argued the identity crisis engendered by Reform's decision to accept Jewish identity through either parent.

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