

GCE

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE A Level **H573**

OCR Report to Centres June 2018

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- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection
- points of advice 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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- Link to **grade boundaries**
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H573/01 Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

The questions gave students a fair mix of general and more specific questions covering several major aspects of the course. Most were able to write three full-length essays, the time spread evenly across the paper. There were occasional signs that some students struggled with timing – a few only answering one or two questions instead of three.

Many responses showed knowledge from other topics and across the specification to support their arguments, suggesting an understanding of the holistic nature of the A level. There were the usual problems with some lacking focus on the exact wording of the question leading candidates to produce more general answers.

We saw some excellent evaluation throughout essays and a full range across the levels. Many students wrote a (sometimes long) introductory paragraph summarising everything they were going to say in the essay (rather in the manner of TV documentaries). This meant some wasting of time, and would in any case be better at the end of the essay. Most candidates had fully appreciated the change in weighting of the new specification although there were still a number who clearly spent most of the essay detailing what they believed to be appropriate AO1 and then adding some AO2 at the end - usually resulting in insufficient depth of analysis for higher bands.

Question 3 was the least popular and the least well done in general - with candidates showing insufficient knowledge of the key theory to attempt a good answer. Question 4 produced the most generic religious experience responses.

Generally speaking, only a few students showed signs of having undertaken research of their own, with most responses following fairly well-worn tracks. It is also worth noting that just comparing scholars does not count as evaluation, candidates need to come to some conclusion to their essay. Therefore X or Y is right with no attempt to justify the view cannot reach the higher levels.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

'The best approach to understanding religious language is through the cataphatic way'. Discuss.

Most excellent answers discussed the strengths and weaknesses of cataphatic approaches, usually using Aquinas' analogy of attribution and proportion, some with Ramsey's Models and Qualifiers to support. We saw some engaged answers that used their own examples to illustrate the types of analogy but most used the bull's urine and bread/baker for attribution and Von Hugel's faithful dog for proportion. Weaker answers merely described the example without relating it to religious language.

Most candidates were familiar with what the cataphatic way was referring to, and were able to compare and contrast the cataphatic way with the apophatic way. There was some confusion of cataphatic with apophatic but these answers were credited with understanding of the content of

the approaches rather than being penalised for misuse of technical terms. There was generally good understanding of these two approaches, although weaker answers tended to know more about the apophatic way. There was a great variety of spellings for the apophatic way – including, ‘apathetic’ and ‘apophatetic’.

Many wrote often substantial descriptions on logical positivism or falsification, which was ignored as irrelevant. A significant number confused Flew’s ‘death of a thousand qualifications’ with the apophatic way. Some used Language Games as an alternative, but it needed comparison with the cataphatic way to be made more relevant to the question.

Although symbolic language was sometimes used effectively, weaker responses confused it with myth (no longer on the specification) and many used it as an alternative to the cataphatic way, not as part of it. Not all made Tillich’s point about symbols participating in what they point to, or the difficulties of this. More successful responses on symbolic language used examples, such as ‘God is good’ or ‘God is love’ and so were able to analyse how effective this was for understanding religious language. This was more difficult if examples of concrete objects (e.g. flag or cross) were used. The most engaged answers on symbolic language used the ideas of Tillich on it opening up the soul to discuss the extent to which this aided understanding.

Question 2

To what extent does Hume successfully argue that observation does not prove the existence of God?

Excellent responses tended to include a variety of Hume’s criticisms and related them to succinct summaries of the teleological and cosmological arguments. Satisfactory and good answers were more likely to give copious descriptions of Aquinas, Paley and more, which left them with little time for depth or detail on Hume. However, most could at least mention the problems of using a mechanical object as a comparison to the natural world and the assumption of a Christian God. A number of responses included the note to chronology that Hume could not have known about Paley’s work – a rather refreshing change.

Evaluation tended to be in terms of whether teleological/cosmological arguments were more successful than Hume. Some used more modern arguments, such as Darwin’s evolutionary theories or Tennent’s anthropic principle - these were credited as supporting Hume’s underlying hypotheses.

Better responses made this link explicit. For more satisfactory responses, the link was not fully justified or implicit. Weaker answers simply juxtaposed alternatives e.g. the Big Bang is better without adding any reasoning. The best answers analysed Hume’s criticisms as well – weighing up how successful these may be, particularly in the light of modern physics. Although some simply accepted the Epicurean thesis of chance without question. In addition, the difficulties of an actual (as distinct from mathematical) infinite regress could have been mentioned. Generally, most students were stronger on describing the arguments and Hume’s objections than on giving possible answers to those objections. Weaker answers turned the essay into simply listing the criticisms of the TA/CA, without linking back to Hume.

Some responses seemed convinced that Hume favoured a priori proofs and spent time talking about the ontological argument. Other weak responses spoke about the ontological argument as a better example without addressing Hume’s criticisms of observation. There were also some tangential responses assessing the moral argument for the existence of God.

Question 3

Assess Boethius' view that divine eternity does not limit human free will.

There were many good explanations of Boethius. The strongest responses were able to explain in detail Boethius' reasoning as to why divine eternity does not limit free will, explaining his concept of simple and conditional necessity. Many good answers would have benefited from including Boethius' use of simple/conditional necessity to add depth to their understanding and argument. Some used Anselm's four-dimensionalist view as an alternative to Boethius but fewer understood how Anselm's idea of eternity meant that all moments were in God equally and so God is with us in the moment of choice.

Responses that were satisfactory and above were aware that Boethius argued for an eternal God who exists outside of time and sees past, present and future at once, many using Aquinas' example of God looking down from a lofty peak. Most were able to give an explanation of divine eternity, and chose to compare this to Swinburne's everlasting God. Evaluation tended to focus on Biblical evidence to discuss God's interaction with the world, and the way in which this is lacking in Boethius' view.

Weaker responses seemed to equate divine eternity with the afterlife, and a number concentrated heavily on the importance of free will rather than the relation of free will and an eternal God who could be seen as omniscient. There were some useful attempts to address the problem of evil that were worthy of credit when tied in to the question.

The weakest responses tended to turn the essay into a debate about how eternity impacts God's other attributes, such as omnipotence. Others tended to turn the debate away from Boethius into whether God should punish/reward people if there was no free will. More use could have been made of the point that omniscience means God knows all it is logically possible to know.

The general confusion over free will and determinism and its relationship with salvation and justification lead to many arguing that Calvin's predestination - concerned with post death judgement, was contrary to human free will on Earth.

It was clear that a minority of candidates did not know who Boethius was, and by extension, what his view on divine eternity was. Some single page responses were encountered, where it was clear candidates had started a response, realised that they did not know enough, then attempted a different question.

Question 4

'Corporate religious experiences are less reliable than individual religious experiences.' Discuss.

Many good, if not wide-ranging, accounts of examples of corporate and individual experience such as the Toronto Blessing or Saul's conversion being most common. Many seemed to think the Blessing took place in the airport, which elicited some interesting images. Most were able to offer a comparison of corporate with individual experiences, which helped their argument. Less successful responses tried to use examples of miracles or near-death experiences – where this was made relevant to the question it was credited but better examples may have made a sustained argument more successful.

Although some listed W James' criteria, there was generally good application of at least some of them to both types of religious experience, which then aided the argument for/against reliability. There were some useful inclusions of psychological studies on social conformity as well as

generic psychological arguments on mass hysteria, to indicate less reliability of corporate experiences.

Better responses tended to emphasise James' pragmatism and emphasis on the life-changing fruits of the experience, and assessing reliability of both types of experience against this.

Some weaker responses tended to confuse Swinburne's principles of credulity and testimony but stronger answers used these effectively in their line of reasoning. Answers were less likely to offer a sound explanation of Swinburne's Principle of credulity than his Principle of Testimony.

Weaker answers did not focus on the exact wording on the question, and did not comment on whether corporate religious experiences were more/less reliable than individual – they simply evaluated them on their own merits. This could earn some credit but not reach the higher levels.

The impression examiners gained was that this was not the type of question on religious experiences many candidates had prepared for, and therefore they repeated stock responses about religious experience, with little regard to the actual question until their conclusion. As the final question, this also seemed to suffer from response being shorter than others.

H573/02 Religion and ethics

1. General Comments:

There was considerable variety in terms of the quality of responses on this component. While a number of candidates wrote very high level responses, there were others who were less successful. Some candidates found the timings and format of the paper, requiring three essays in two hours quite challenging. There was a significant minority who answered only two questions or wrote the briefest of answers to their third question thus significantly disadvantaging themselves. It was not unusual to find candidates achieving quite different marks on at least one of their three questions which may suggest that were stronger on some topics than others. A significant number of candidates wrote essays that did not reflect the balance between the two assessment objectives in that they were dominated by AO1 – knowledge and understanding – which is worth 40% of the marks. Better responses focused on evaluation and were ones that sustained a line of reasoning throughout, engaging in a discussion of the arguments presented. Prioritising information over evaluation was also evident where candidates wrote at length about material that was on the old specification such as the various thinkers on conscience. This was credited when appropriate but often the feeling was that this material had been included at the expense of material that was more directly relevant. Barely legible handwriting – this was felt to be worse this year - and extra booklets that were not in the correct order made the examiner's job harder than it needed to be on occasions

2 Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

Evaluate Aquinas' theological approach to conscience.

Most candidates had a good knowledge of Aquinas' views on conscience. They were often able to confidently discuss ratio, synderesis, conscientia and vincible/invincible ignorance. A few weaker responses stated the common misconception that Aquinas believed conscience to be the voice of God but on the whole candidates were able to explain that Aquinas in prioritising reason gives a different theological view of the conscience. Most candidates opted to assess Aquinas by reference to Freud. This was done with varying success. High level responses tied points back to Aquinas and kept the focus of the question in mind whereas less successful answers turned the question into a comparison and juxtaposed the two thinkers. This meant that the analysis of Aquinas presented was only implicit at best. At times it felt that some candidates would have preferred a question on Freud as his views dominated some answers. There was also a reasonable number of candidates who approached the question as a list and went through numerous thinkers such as Butler, Piaget, Newman and Fromm but without any depth, meaning that the focus on Aquinas was lost. There was some good discussion around how Aquinas explains moral mistakes and how he may be better placed to explain a variety of views than other theological thinkers. Encouragingly there was some good synoptic reasoning in the use of Augustine and the Fall to challenge Aquinas' optimistic idea of synderesis. In more limited answers, the analysis of Aquinas was limited to the assertion that it is religious and old fashioned. One common fallacy was the suggestion that this view was of no help to atheists; this seemed to overlook the fact that the existence/non-existence of God is logically distinct from whether people believe in him or not.

Question 2

“‘Good’ is meaningful.’ Discuss.

Most candidates who attempted this question produced a good response. There was good understanding of the main meta-ethical theories including use of Bradley and Foot as a way to illustrate Naturalism. The is-ought fallacy and an explanation of Moore’s intuitionism was also a common feature of essays. Emotivism was not always as clear as the other two theories; the idea that it involves making decisions based on emotions and that is meaningful because it is based on emotions were common misunderstandings. However, there were some very good responses that were able to use Ayer’s verification principle and explain that morality is neither analytic nor synthetic. While some candidates approached this essay by writing what seemed almost a pre-prepared ‘shopping-list’ with an introduction, a neat paragraph dedicated to each of the approaches and thinkers, followed by a conclusion, the stronger responses were able to use their knowledge of each approach to successfully evaluate and analyse the topic, thus gaining higher marks. The word ‘good’ in the question is in inverted commas and is a technical term from the specification directing the candidate to meta-ethical theories. This was missed by a number of the poorer responses; while this question could have conceivably been approached through an evaluation of the different ways in which ‘good’ is used and understood in different normative theories, in practice, candidates who did this often just produced a superficial argument about how everyone has different opinions about what good means.

Question 3

Assess the view that Natural Law is of no help with regard to the issue of euthanasia.

This was the most popular question on the paper although it was not always answered as well as some of the others. There was some knowledge of Natural Law in that most candidates could apply primary precepts, mainly the preservation of life, and suggest that Natural Law might generally oppose euthanasia. A number of responses did not really progress beyond this. Better answers demonstrated a detailed understanding of how the different elements of Natural Law - primary and secondary precepts, use of reason, telos, real and apparent goods, double effect, etc. - might provide complex and varying answers to issues raised by different types of euthanasia. In terms of evaluation most candidates tried to bring in Situation Ethics as a counter-point but at times were unable to contrast these views effectively to answer the question. The volume of material on Situation Ethics led to a feeling that some candidates would have preferred a question on Situation Ethics. Better responses used Situation Ethics and brought the contrasts to develop their assessment of Natural Law. Good use was made of the notion that Natural Law protects the vulnerable whereas it does not give adequate focus on quality of life. Although at times the use of other ethical theories meant that candidates had lost focus on the question, this was not always the case; the views of Peter Singer were used to good effect in a number of responses to criticise Natural Law. Some candidates produced more limited evaluation responses where sanctity of life and quality of life were not really tied in. Here the argument was limited to the assertions that ‘do not kill’ and ‘God has a plan’, or the view that Natural Law could not be helpful because it was an old theory. A number of candidates had clearly learned several case studies. Better responses used the case studies to exemplify the argument illustrating the key points whereas less successful responses were often dominated by lengthy case studies without any clear argument.

Question 4

'Kantian ethics provides the best approach to Business Ethics.' Discuss.

This question unlike questions 1 and 3 specifically allowed a comparison to be made. Most candidates opted to discuss Utilitarianism alongside Kantian Ethics. The understanding and application of Kantian Ethics to issues in Business Ethics was variable. Weaker responses settled on the idea that people should do their duty and tell the truth but the full implications were not unpacked. Better answers focused on the idea of treating persons as ends and discussed the extent to which this is possible and desirable in various scenarios. There was good understanding of key concepts in Business Ethics such as Corporate Social Responsibility, whistleblowing and globalisation. These were often illustrated by examples and case studies which generally helped to advance the argument. On a small minority of answers the case studies took over and there was only a little on the ethical ideas amidst a range of long anecdotes. There was good understanding of the ideas of Milton Friedman which candidates understood that Kant may have opposed. Where Utilitarianism was deployed the quality was mixed and it was not unusual to see the theory reduced to doing what is most pleasurable or what most people want. Better responses were able to see differences in the Utilitarian approach and there were, on occasions, good use of Mill's non-harm principle. Although some candidates were able to evaluate and reach a judgement, this was not always the case and there was some attempted analysis that was merely juxtaposition.

H573/03 Developments in Christian thought

1. General Comments:

The most popular question seemed to be Question 3 although no question attracted significantly fewer responses. The full range of marks was seen, from level 1 responses to those that well-exceeded full marks. While there was evidence of wider reading, the best responses were characterised by thoughtful engagement with the question directly and precise answers. Length was not a requirement to achieve level 6, neither was having gone beyond the specification.

The best responses showed real evidence of scholarship, not necessarily naming scholars, and this scholarship was used to create argument-driven essays that focused on the question throughout. Some candidates tended to reproduce what seemed to be 'pre-planned' essays, which they hoped might come up, in order to shoehorn a response, without specific reference to the actual question asked in the examination. Some candidates' handwriting was poor, which required significant investigative skills to decipher what was written. Candidates should be conscious of this and do what they can to improve their handwriting in advance of the examination.

Overall, there were a number of candidates that did not hone in on the questions themselves and fell into the trap about talking about the general topic as opposed to the specific question. A noticeable minority of candidates only answered two questions, often the two that tested areas of the specification that are not also on the AS specification.

2. Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

'Bonhoeffer's theology is still relevant today.' Discuss.

Many of the responses here focused on the contextual nature of Bonhoeffer's theology and used this appropriately. A significant number of candidates focused on the history or biography of Bonhoeffer instead of looking into his theology. While it might be argued that one is contingent on the other, the reality is that the question required some understanding and elucidation of his specific theological ideas. Some candidates did not focus on the AO2 criteria enough, and instead lost the engagement with the question. Some good examples focused on whether Bonhoeffer's theology was ever relevant. There was some excellent writing on discipleship and solidarity too – tied into liberation theology and civil disobedience. A few used Religionless Christianity, no rusty swords and the western void to good effect.

Cheap and costly grace were frequently misunderstood concepts (confusion over whether cheap grace means salvation by works has been widespread) and the emphasis on the divine sacrifice of costly grace was usually superseded in candidates' responses by an emphasis on Bonhoeffer's apparent disagreement with materialistic values (and therefore how this made Bonhoeffer's ideas relevant today in our increasingly consumerist society). The best answers acknowledged Bonhoeffer's commitment to the centrality of the Incarnation and discipleship in the Christian's life (and associated ideas like solidarity and awareness of God's will) and the extent to which this would still be relevant in more peaceful circumstances. Additionally, while

Bonhoeffer has become famous for his role in the attempted assassination of Hitler, his actual role is generally understood to have been minimal and unfortunately candidates generally portrayed Bonhoeffer's actions as some kind of superhero antics, rather than against the backdrop of a life of theological commitment to the Scriptures and the Incarnation.

In terms of answering the drive of the question – the relevance of Bonhoeffer's theology for today – there were some excellent responses that showed where there was still suffering in the world and then went on to use Bonhoeffer to show that the Christian has a duty to act. A wide range of interesting examples were seen, although one example usually sufficed to make the point in a given paragraph.

Question 2

To what extent was Jesus merely a political liberator?

Some candidates successfully grappled with the idea of Jesus as political liberator – that is, Jesus as wishing to challenge the ruling authorities or status quo and aiming for wholesale reform of society, although credit was given to those who used religious liberation, such as the challenge of Sabbath laws, as political and religious authorities were very much intertwined in Jesus' context. Others picked from a number of Bible passages, often misquoted, to try to explore the person of Jesus in general terms.

Many candidates discussed whether Jesus was a political liberator or not but did not focus on whether this was all he was. There were some good comparisons: Jesus as Messiah, Teacher of Wisdom, social liberator and Son of God. However, many talked about these different aspects of Jesus Christ, without taking the question itself into consideration. There was considerable focus on the idea of liberation rather than the political nature and an overemphasis on Jesus being a Zealot.

Many candidates were well able to demonstrate that there is considerable disagreement in the scholarship about the extent to which Jesus was a political liberator, teacher of wisdom or Son of God (or all three). The best responses demonstrated deep understanding of the hermeneutical issues associated with determining conclusions about Jesus' status, with the strongest candidates acknowledging that evidence of a human hand in the collation of the New Testament would significantly muddy the waters when trying to nail down Jesus' nature. For example, the argument that Jesus was a Zealot is actually quite controversial in the scholarly debate, and yet many candidates argued decisively that he was also ably assisted by Judas Iscariot, the 'dagger man'. Some candidates supplemented their interpretation of Jesus as a political liberator to include the insights of the Liberation Theologians. This was successful to a greater or lesser extent, depending on whether candidates kept in mind that the critique of the Liberation Theologians, while Biblically inspired, is considerably contextual with reference to the Latin American situation. The best candidates were able to distinguish clearly between Jesus' role as a social liberator and as a political liberator, acknowledging that being one does not necessarily imply being the other too, with effective use of scriptural examples to support their argument.

There was some well-deployed Biblical evidence and scholarship from Hick, Lewis, Brandon, Sanders, and Aslan, among others, and candidates clearly knew a great deal about this topic but unfortunately often lost sight of the question.

Question 3

Assess the view that Mary Daly's theology proves that Christianity is sexist.

By far the most popular question, many candidates have evidently had their interest captured by this topic. The use of Ruether, Chan and others to critique Daly was common, although Ruether was often rather overused. Other areas of the specification, most notably *Mulieris Dignitatem*, were used with varying success. The idea of 'proof' was interestingly addressed. At times, this was done in terms of evidential examples of Christianity not being sexist but, more often than not, the focus was on how it is. There were some insightful references to Daly's own experience clouding her judgement and being the basis of her theology.

This question encouraged considerable comment from some candidates about the extent to which Christianity is sexist in general, rather than with specific reference to Daly's thought. Better responses acknowledged that the historical circumstances of the collation / writing / revelation of the Biblical texts were patriarchal and therefore this might mean that Christianity was inescapably sexist, despite the best attempts of figures like Jesus to demonstrate their commitment to the plight of women (to name just one example). Candidates with greater awareness of hermeneutics, exegesis and eisegesis were better able to analyse the extent to which Daly proves that Christianity is sexist and, as a consequence, the critique that she is selective in her approach was effective. Many commented on Daly's reference to the unholy trinity, and yet few candidates unpicked in detail what her emphasis on war, genocide and rape meant for women in practice. Frequently, candidates fell into the trap of criticising Daly *ad hominem*, rather than focussing on the details of her theology (for example, by referencing that fact that Daly was reported to have denied men entry to her lectures as evidence for her argument's difficulties).

Some candidates, who knew a lot about Daly, were unable to use the material successfully to engage with the idea of whether she had successfully proven Christianity to be sexist. However, successful responses were seen that focused entirely on Daly as well as engaging with different aspects of Christianity's approach to women over time.

Question 4

'Secularism does not pose a threat to Christianity.' Discuss.

This question demonstrated a very broad spectrum of interpretation of what secularism is, how it differs from secularisation and the extent to which secularism presents a threat to religion in general (or only to Christianity). However, weaker responses frequently interpreted it as being about pluralism rather than secularism, with a number of responses unable to distinguish between the two. Some responses wrote on Dawkins and Freud extensively but did not apply this successfully to the question itself. The best answers acknowledged that the ideas of thinkers such as Dawkins and Freud, while in isolation might not present a threat to Christianity, could give rise to different perspectives about the role and importance of Christianity in public life.

Analysis of the differences between programmatic and procedural secularism were useful, provided that there was also a genuine understanding of the relationship of the State and the Church in the first place. Some candidates tended to assume that since the Church and State had always been aligned (to an extent), then there was no reason why this would change. Similarly, some candidates took this question to be an opportunity to discuss the problems of

pluralism in an increasingly secular society, which did not always add to the depth of the analysis in response to the specific question. These candidates tended also to focus more on the influence of Islam in the context of secularism, which did not add to the quality of the response.

The threat to Christianity was analysed reasonably well with some good examples of how the UK is becoming more secular. Some candidates used examples from outside a UK context, e.g., France and the USA, quite effectively. A comparison to new religious movements and charismatic-type populist elements of Christianity was also seen in some responses. There was some useful engagement with the debate around faith schools.

A number of responses followed very similar patterns, presumably having drawn on the same text book, but which led to some of these not engaging with the question directly.

H573/04 Developments in Islamic thought

1. General Comments:

All four questions were answered by this year's cohort and appeared to be equally popular. A significant number of candidates seemed to run out of time on their third question, suggesting that closer attention needs to be paid to timings when preparing for the exam.

In addition, a minority of candidates only answered two questions, as was the requirement for the old A2 specification. This clearly had a large impact on their overall grade, regardless of how well the two essays were written.

On the whole this year's cohort appeared to have a generally sound knowledge of the topics being assessed. However, while the full range of levels were reflected in the responses only a minority of candidates reached a level 6 for the AO1 and AO2 elements.

2. Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

Critically assess the view that the Sufi master-disciple relationship contradicts the belief that God is one.

AO1 This was a reasonably popular question and the majority of candidates showed, at least, a sound understanding of Sufism generally. The strongest responses were those that demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the dynamics of the Sufi master-disciple relationship. For example, some candidates showed a clear appreciation of the fact that attaching oneself to a master is a requirement for Sufis in order to attain fana. They were also able to illustrate how this works by providing clear examples of how Sufi masters guide their disciples. In addition to this they were able to explain the concept of God's oneness (tawhid) in depth.

The weaker responses were those that referred to Sufism and Sufi practices generally but were unable to show any real understanding of the actual Sufi master-disciple relationship.

AO2 There were a few candidates who did not engage in any real level of evaluation and these responses were only able to get a level 1/2 at best.

However, the majority of candidates offered a reasonable variety of arguments to help evaluate the two responses and were able to reach, at least, a reasonably justified conclusion with a few achieving a level 6.

Most candidates referred to the idea that attaching oneself to a master could lead to idolatry (shirk), which clearly contradicts the belief that God is one. The better responses were those that were able to develop this argument discussing, for example, specific practices that a master might teach that might support the argument.

The weakest responses were those that did not focus in on the Sufi master-disciple relationship for the AO1 element. These candidates were unable to engage in any effective evaluation, relating to the question.

Question 2

‘The infallible Imams should not be used as sources of wisdom and authority.’ Discuss.

AO1 There were some excellent responses to this question, with a few candidates gaining a level 6 for this element of the questions. These candidates showed a deep understanding of the Shi’a belief in the infallible Imams alongside the contrasting Sunni views on the subject. They were also able to explain, in depth, alternative sources of wisdom and authority used by Muslims. For example, the Qur’an, Hadith and Sunnah of Muhammad pbuh.

There were a few candidates, however, who displayed little or no understanding of who the infallible Imams are. These candidates spoke of Imams solely as leaders of prayer and sources of religious guidance but showed no knowledge of the differences between Shi’a and Sunni belief, as regards Imams. These responses were unable to achieve higher than a level 2.

AO2 A significant number of candidates were able to offer one or more arguments to support the view. For example, the fact that not all Muslims believe in the infallible Imams suggest they shouldn’t be used as sources of wisdom and authority. Most candidates were also able to offer, at least, one reason why you might disagree e.g. the infallible Imams are an incredibly important part of Shi’a belief so they should be used as sources of wisdom and authority.

The best responses were able to engage in a deep level of analysis by, for example, assessing the belief in infallible Imams in itself. They did this by discussing how credible this belief might be.

Again the weakest responses were those who had little or no knowledge of the concept of the infallible Imams. Their evaluation was limited because of a lack of accurate subject knowledge.

Question 3

To what extent is it true to say that Islam does not allow Muslims to fully integrate into non-Muslim countries?

AO1 This question was answered reasonably well, with the majority of candidates being able to offer examples of non-Muslim countries. Most responses also demonstrated some level of understanding of what Islam says about integrating with non-Muslims. Those responses achieving the highest levels were able to describe a variety of examples of Islamic issues that could either allow for or hinder integration into non-Muslim countries. For example, issues referred to included the Islamic prohibitions on interest and alcohol and the existence of Islamic banks and halal butchers in some non-Muslim countries.

The weaker responses were those who were unable to offer any specific examples, such as those mentioned above. Some candidates also wrote solely about integration in the time of Muhammad pbuh and did not address the issue from a current perspective. This limited the level they were able to achieve.

AO2 On the whole candidates were able to show a satisfactory to good level of evaluation. However, some responses only offered arguments for one side of the issue. The majority of candidates gave one or two arguments to illustrate the view that Islam does support integration into non-Muslim countries. A significant number also offered arguments to show how it could be said that Islam does not allow Muslims to integrate into non-Muslim countries.

The main weakness for many candidates was that they did not all address the ‘fully’ aspect of the question. Quite a few responses concluded that Islam either allows integration or it doesn’t without quantifying the extent to which it does either. This meant that their conclusions were not fully justified and so limited the level they could achieve.

Question 4

Critically assess the impact of modern feminism on attitudes towards the hijab.

AO1 When answering this question most candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the hijab, with most showing a sound knowledge of what the Qur’an says on the topic. The area that was weaker, for some candidates, was explaining what modern feminism is and being able to give examples of modern feminist views of the hijab.

There were, however, some candidates who showed an excellent knowledge of modern feminists and who were able to express, eloquently, the impact their views had on attitudes towards the hijab.

AO2 This was probably the question, overall, that had the weakest AO2 element. Quite a few candidates appeared to struggle when it came to critically assessing the impact of modern feminism on attitudes towards the hijab.

The question requires candidates to make some level of judgement as to both the extent of the impact on attitudes towards the hijab and whether that impact is predominantly positive or negative. The strongest responses were from those candidates who fully appreciated the demands of the question and were able to address this fully in their analysis of the issue.

H573/05 Developments in Jewish thought

1. General Comments:

There were just under 70 candidates for this paper; candidates came from a variety of centres and this breadth of candidature added depth and richness to the responses read by the examiners. There were several outstanding answers which scored full marks or near full marks; the knowledge and understanding shown in these answers was of a level which the examiners have not seen before and this was very pleasing. There appeared to be some new centres undertaking the study of Judaism and exam for OCR; these centres should be congratulated for their engagement with the specification, high level of teaching, and the quality and depth of candidate understanding.

The marks credited covered the levels of response at both AO1 and AO2; the questions differentiated well between candidates producing a range of marks. All questions were attempted with question 4 being the most popular. There were no rubric errors and all candidates answered three questions in full. Nearly all papers were seen and marked by the entire marking team due to the small cohort entry size.

This was the first year of the new specification and answers were, in the main, very pleasing. Many of the candidates produced detailed answers showing a 'good' or 'very good' knowledge and understanding of the specification content. Candidates were able to manipulate scholarly views, sources of wisdom and authority and academic approaches to create coherent, developed and justified arguments. As above, there were some answers which showed 'excellent' levels of response to all questions; these responses were a pleasure to read and showed a high level of sophistication. Centres should be congratulated for their high level of teaching and engagement with this unit of the specification which does not have an accompanying textbook produced for student use. Students had clearly engaged at a high level with some complex and challenging material and their answers showed maturity and development of thought.

Some candidate responses however, despite being lengthy, could not be marked highly as they did not address the new specification content, rather discussing aspects of the legacy specification for Jewish Scriptures (G573/83) and/or Judaism (G579/89). This was most prominent in question 2; here some candidates continued to discuss at length the covenant with Adam (legacy specification) and Noah (legacy specification) which was not credit worthy when the information was presented as AO1 knowledge and not used to evaluate the set question.

Some answers were very short and presented an answer more suitable for GCSE and with little or no reference to the specification content; these answers did not score highly as the candidate was unable to show anything other than a basic demonstration of knowledge and understanding. Centres are reminded that the specification content must be addressed in teaching as this is that which is examined. Similarly, centres are reminded to ensure that candidates are aware of the AO1 and AO2 marking criteria as set out in the levels of response; answers must focus on scholarly views, academic approaches, and/or sources of wisdom and authority to demonstrate AO1 and AO2 understanding and argument. The lower marked answers often showed no engagement with scholarly or academic learning or approaches; this resulted in a less developed and sophisticated answers due to a lack of critical engagement. Again, centres are reminded that the specification and the curriculum planner materials on the OCR website offer

suggestions as to academic approaches and scholarship that could be used to develop higher order thinking and to show a range of views.

Despite this, it was very pleasing that the new areas of the specification had clearly been approached by centres very well and with a high level of rigour; in terms of this paper, the content on Jewish feminism had been taught very well. It was very pleasing to see candidates grappling with some complex ideas and it was evident that candidates had engaged first hand with the suggested primary reading for this section of the specification – although this is not indicative content, candidate interaction with the reading had clearly added to depth of responses seen.

The best responses addressed the specific question asked, considered all aspects of the question in a relevant way and were supported with careful analysis. When candidates did not achieve higher marks, it was usually because they did not answer the question set and instead provided an answer for a question they had pre-prepared for and/or did not make reference to a range of scholarly views, religious sources or academic approaches. Some answers did try to adopt a more ‘synoptic’ style and attempted to use learning from across the specification to produce a sustained line of reasoning. Some candidates were able to do this skilfully, however, some of the answers appeared to lack the exam skills to do this successfully and answers became unfocused and wandered from the set question. While it can be very useful to approach a question synoptically, candidates should be aware that this requires knowledge to be used to deepen evaluative discussion; the additional material should be related back to the set question in order that it does not become superfluous.

2. Comments on individual questions

Question 1

‘For an inclusive Judaism, *Brit Ahuvim* is not just a desire but a necessity.’ Discuss.

This was the least popular question, however, the answers were very high-level; candidates were able to skilfully construct fluid arguments which showed a detailed and sophisticated understanding of the specification content. This is a new component of study for this specification and centres should be congratulated for the way this has been taught; those that answered this question showed very good knowledge, understanding and maturity of response. Some candidates discussed *Brit Milah* and as such scored zero.

The answers to this question were in the main marked as Level 6. Candidates were able to discuss confidentially the nature of traditional Jewish marriage (*agunah*, the notion of acquisition) and Adler’s *Brit Ahuvim*, which as a partnership, rethinks and reinterprets the traditional view of marriage. Most answers were also able to skilfully discuss Adler’s thinking around the dissolving of the *Brit Ahuvim*. It was disappointing that no answers discussed at length how Adler’s approach is in tune with modern concerns such as same-sex relationships and civil partnerships and this may be an area that centres wish to revisit.

The level of A02 analysis and evaluation was very high and candidates were able to draw upon Plaskow to offer an alternative way of deconstructing the question. The answers to this question were very pleasing and all examiners commented on how candidates had approached this question with a high level of knowledge, understanding and criticality.

Question 2

Evaluate the extent to which covenants are promises on the part of G-d and not two-way agreements.

This question was popular and produced answers across the levels of response. There were some 'excellent' and 'very good' responses for AO1 and AO2 which engaged critically with the question, textual exegesis and scholarship. There were some answers that received nearly full marks however; some answers were only able to show weak or basic demonstration of knowledge and understanding as they lacked detailed awareness of the specification content. Excellent answers were those which were able to critically discuss the concept of covenant within the context of Ancient Near Eastern parity and suzerainty treaties and were able to offer detailed exegesis on the set texts of Genesis 12:1–3, 7; 15:1–21; 17:1–21 and Exodus 19:1–20:20. There was a lack of reference in some answers to scholarly views; centres would benefit from ensuring that a range of scholarly views are looked at to supplement further textual exegesis. Centres may also benefit from ensuring that candidates are aware of the terminology and structure of the specification content to ensure candidate answers are engaging with the set content, i.e. the signs of the covenant, covenantal promises and their significance, contemporary views as to the date, authorship and theological purpose of the text.

Some answers did not score highly as they discussed at length the old specification content; although demonstrating accurate understanding of the old specification this learning was not used to develop explicitly AO2 argument for the set question. The best responses were those which were able to engage at a high level with the trigger words of the question – promises and two-way agreement. Candidates that were able to engage in high level analysis and evaluation and 'pull apart' the concept of covenant from a religious, historical-critical, and modern context scored highly. Many candidates were able to show satisfactory and good knowledge of the set texts, however, those that scored highly were those which engaged with the nuances of covenant and were able to argue that the covenant marks the beginning of Israel as the people of G-d and a developing relationship between G-d and man.

Question 3

'The process of conversion to Judaism is too complex.' Discuss.

Many candidates were able to engage with this question successfully. Good answers were those which were able to discuss conversion as a concept and the process of conversion i.e. circumcision, questions to proselyte, *mikveh*, the role of the Jewish court (*bet din*). It was somewhat disappointing that more candidates did not discuss how identification as a Jew can be defined by birth, conversion and patrilineal/matrilineal descent as this could have added richness to both the AO1 and AO2 discussion. High level answers were those that were also able to cite sources of wisdom and authority such as the *Shulkhan Arukh* successfully. Some candidates discussed the Book of Ruth; while some candidates were able to use this source skilfully to develop critical evaluation, some candidates discussed Ruth for the majority of their answer (presumably as Ruth was a major area of study in the old specification) which resulted in an answer which was off question. It was disappointing that many answers did not explore the personal motivations and reasons behind conversion such as marriage or faith. The best answers were those that any answers were able to discuss that conversion requires a personal commitment between an individual and G-d and what this might mean.

Answers could have been further improved by deconstructing the trigger word of the question 'complex' and the motivations for conversion – is faith complex? What does 'complex' actually

mean? Complex in what way, and for whom? However, many of the answers for this question showed clear structure and the candidates worked through the specification content in a logical manner, so demonstrating good subject knowledge and understanding. There were some pleasing and high level answers to this question showing a depth and breadth of learning and evaluation.

Question 4

‘The refutation of G-d is the only acceptable response to the Holocaust.’ Discuss.

This was the most popular question and in the main, was answered very well. Most candidates were able to engage with this question successfully and there were some very good AO2 levels of response. Some candidates did not connect the trigger word of the question - ‘refutation’ - with the specification content; rather than discussing Rubenstein as the central focus of the answer, a general overview of theodicies was given with limited evaluation in terms of ‘refutation’. On the whole however, answers were detailed, focused and showed clear engagement with the specification content. Most answers were able to cite with success the arguments of Rubenstein, Fackenheim, Berkovitz and Maybaum in order to support AO2 analysis.

Some answers spent too long giving a historical overview to the Holocaust – this was superfluous for this question. Moreover, some candidates did not appear to fully understand Rubenstein’s thinking in terms of the concept ‘death of G-d’ – centres may wish to revisit this aspect of their teaching. The highest-level answers were those which went above a basic description of Rubenstein and discussed doubt of G-d and G-d as the Ultimate Nothing, and how Rubenstein presents a demythologising of the Jewish traditions by rejecting the traditional image of G-d of the Hebrew Bible.

There were some excellent answers which scored full marks; these showed skilful manipulation of learning to construct a high level and detailed response to the question. These answers also drew upon wider theological and philosophical learning; discussions of how the Holocaust can be seen as an example of the evidential problem of evil and the logical problem of evil, and as such how this historical event may challenge, and ‘refute’, the G-d of classical theism were skilfully presented.

H573/06 Developments in Buddhist thought

1. General Comments:

The candidates appeared to be well prepared for the demands of the paper. The majority of candidates understood the format and there were very few rubric errors in construction of the responses.

The questions were very clear in their language and structure and were easy for the vast majority of candidates to access and understand and therefore candidates were able to structure their responses appropriately.

Overall, candidates appeared confident in their preparation and approach to the paper and were aware of the necessary structures. Most candidates were well prepared by centres and they understood how to best respond to the questions.

All four questions were attempted by candidates however, question 1 (the life of the Buddha) was the most popular. Candidates made good use of a range of sources of information to respond to the questions including specific Buddhist texts, teachings of the Buddha and modern Buddhist scholars including Harvey, Gethin, Cush, Side, Rahula and Bhikkhu Bodhi. Candidates did not need to use named scholars in order to meet the assessment criteria (and those who did not were not disadvantaged) but where they have done, it has shown how well prepared for the examination the candidates have been. Some knew a considerable amount about Buddhism and should be very proud of the knowledge and understanding they demonstrated.

With questions about concepts the stronger candidates tended to use text like the Nikayas and linked the concept in the question to other Buddhist concepts to show how and why concepts exist as they do. This interdependence of concepts is key to understanding and showing understanding of Buddhism.

Some candidates did not access the higher marks on the more specific questions such as question 3 (Rinzai and Soto Zen). Candidates needed to make sure that they gave clear and specific examples for example giving specific similarities and differences. For the higher marks candidates needed to show why there were these similarities and differences.

2. Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

To what extent is the life of the Buddha important to Buddhists?

The most popular method of responding adopted by candidates was to take a biographical approach in detailing the various significant points in the life of the Buddha, often starting with his experience of the four sights and his rejection of his early hedonistic life-style due to this before going through his time as an ascetic, the enlightenment itself, his first sermon in the deer park, his teaching of the Dharma and his eventual death. These descriptive amounts did not seem to attract the higher marks.

Candidates who responded well to question 1 tended to give more of an explanation than description with some specific ideas about why the Buddha's life is important. They have selected parts of the Buddha's life and explained maybe with examples why it is important to Buddhists. They have linked his life to some concepts and/or to different beliefs and practices.

Candidates who got the higher marks tended to provide a more focused response. They gave clearer explanations and better links to specific concepts, teachings, beliefs or practices. Candidates suggested things like "the Buddha's life is important to Theravada because but in Mahayana the Trikaya doctrine..." or the Bodhisattvas are of more help, or that the teachings/dharma or sangha are of more importance.

Question 2

'*Nibbana* cannot be explained.' Discuss.

Candidates made good use of the four noble truths and eightfold path in responding to this question. Some responses did not really tackle why nirvana might be difficult to explain, instead just giving reasons why it can be explained. Some did see that by its very nature a concept such as nirvana is beyond explanation.

Some candidates gave a good explanation of what Buddhists think nirvana is. They gave a range of different beliefs and/or a discussion on different ways to describe it, via negative or the end of suffering/ rebirth. But these Buddhist concepts are talked about superficially. Better explanations included some links to specific teachings such as three fires, unconditioned state, samsara but they talk about these concepts in more detail showing a better understanding of why nirvana is/ is not beyond words.

The highest marks were credited to candidates who included discussions around specific teachings such as nirvana being an unconditioned state and what this meant in Theravada and Mahayana terms.

Question 3

'There are no significant differences between Soto and Rinzai Zen Buddhism.' Discuss.

Some candidates described the main practices of both Rinzai and Soto Zen. Some talked about Rinzai being violent and monks receiving beatings. This is not always entirely correct and some candidates did try to show how Soto did not do this and that was the difference. These candidates did not always achieve the highest marks.

Most candidates did provide an explanation of Rinzai and Soto Zen with some of the similarities and differences explained often with clear examples. The better responses gave Rinzai and Soto practices which were mostly correct.

As with question 1 the really good responses demonstrated some clear knowledge and understanding of why there are these differences. Candidates could have gone further still and shown whether these similarities and differences strengthen or weaken the philosophical concepts that underpin these two types of Zen Buddhism. This level of analysis would attract

the highest marks. This is true for any question which asked for very specific information such as questions 2 and 4.

Question 4

Critically assess the view that social activism is an important part of Buddhist practice.

Most candidates did not have many examples of social activism or engaged Buddhism when responding to this question. Many made really good use of the eightfold path and the Mahayana concepts of Karuna and the Bodhisattva ideal.

Some gave explanations of the different ways Buddhists such as Thich Nhat Hanh have been socially active and some idea that this is linked to the teachings/practice of the Buddha.

As with previous questions the better responses gave some evaluation, for example are they Buddhists practices or do they detract from the goal of enlightenment. Some also gave a detailed discussion of different examples of social activism for example they looked at the local examples within Sri Lanka of monasteries co-ordinating the development of local co-operatives to sell crops at higher prices, or specific examples such as the Sangha Metta Project in Thailand. These were often contrasted with the involvement of some Buddhist groups in the attacks on the Rohingya Muslims in Burma.

H573/07 Developments in Hindu thought

1. General Comments:

This was the first paper assessing a new specification; examiners felt that it was a fair starting point, with accessible questions offering an appropriate level of challenge. All candidates managed to attempt the required three questions within the available time and no rubric errors were observed. Question 3 was the least popular question of the four, and also the least well answered.

Most candidates had at least some Hindu specific knowledge relevant to the questions asked and recognition of Sanskrit terms used in questions was good. The depth and complexity of knowledge, together with selection and explicit application of it to the question were more variable.

2. Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

'It is not possible to practise Hinduism outside India.' Discuss.

Most candidates attempted this question and it was well answered overall. Candidates were familiar with different forms and ways of practising Hinduism and many were able to utilise knowledge of the history of Hinduism in their responses. Responses were not purely descriptive with candidates offering reasoned argument for both sides of the issue. Even at the lower levels, candidates were able to offer exemplar evidence that Hinduism is practised outside of India and use this to present a supported conclusion.

Question 2

Critically consider the claim that building good *karma* helps a person to achieve liberation.

While candidates overall had no difficulty understanding the issue they had been asked to write about nuanced and/or in depth knowledge of the complexities of karma was less evident. The weakest responses did not distinguish karma yoga from the broader concept of good karma and/or presented a simplistic understanding of good karma accumulated through successive lives moving the soul up a ladder of rebirth that culminates in liberation. Some candidates approached the question as a request to compare and contrast the different margas, which usually included some relevant material but was too far from the question asked for the higher level marks. Others used the concept of dharma as a competing concept with karma, attempting to conclude that it was therefore more important to liberation - approaches like this generally relied upon an over-simplification of both concepts and/or a failure to recognise that even dharmic actions produce karma.

In the better responses, some candidates demonstrated a more holistic understanding, being able to relate karma to other concepts such as maya and to consider whether the existence of karma of any kind is a tie to rebirth rather than a path to liberation. Other candidates identified different forms of karma and the ways it is collected and expressed through past, current and future rebirths. Surprisingly, the concepts of sakam and nishkam karma went almost entirely

unmentioned at all levels of response while parabdhā, kriyamāna and sanchita karma were included relatively frequently.

Question 3

Assess the importance of holy persons in modern Hinduism.

This was the least popular question of the four. It was also poorly answered for the most part, with the term ‘holy persons’ appearing to cause some confusion for candidates. The majority of candidates attempting this question focused on the concept of deity and its role/importance within Hinduism. While a consideration of avatar would have been an acceptable interpretation of the question this was rarely mentioned, suggesting a basic misunderstanding or unfamiliarity with the concept of holy persons as outlined by the specification. It also limited the opportunities for discussion as most candidates taking this approach also took the view that gods are essential to religion and had no counter-argument to offer.

Where the roles of gurus, priests and/or sadhus was identified as the substance of the question responses were better. Candidates had more to say overall, but responses still tended to be largely descriptive with only limited attempts to address the question of importance.

Question 4

Analyse the idea that different forms of Hinduism would be better described as separate religions.

This question was answered well overall, with discussion about the roots of both Hinduism and the academic study of it commonly included and reflected upon. Attempts to grapple with the contested nature of the concept of religion were uncommon, although this issue was frequently implicit in the discursive parts of the response. Approaches focussing on philosophical schools were creditable, but most candidates focused on the theistic traditions of contemporary Hinduism. For some this limited their response, as they were unclear on difference beyond the names of the deity for which the tradition was named. However, there were some strong responses able to link both philosophical and theistic traditions and explore their different origins and substances as a means of analysing similarity. Weaker responses were often characterised by a Christianised view of the broad concept of religion, leading to somewhat clunky comparisons with Christian denominations and the relationship between the Abrahamic religions. Some candidates went into great detail about the different forms, with the AO2 elements being more implicit.

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