

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H572**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H172**

OCR Report to Centres

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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

General Comments

This session there seems to have been more scripts achieving lower results than usual, which could have come about for a number of reasons. Firstly, it seems that candidates are not always aware which part of the specification is being questioned at times. While it is laudable for candidates to make use of a range of material in their answers, especially at AO2, it was important that they noted that Question 1 was from the Religion and Science section and question 3 was from the Judaeo-Christian background section of the specification.

There is also concern that the depth of candidate answers has not been as good as in previous years. Question 2a was a key example to note: this was often dealt with simplistically, and the skill of explaining was not always evident. This could be overcome by study of the specific texts that relate to the specification, for example *Meditations* 5 and *Genesis* 1-2. Whilst candidates do not need to quote from specified texts verbatim, a good understanding of them is required to access the higher bands in the Levels of Response. Another area where depth was often missing was question 3a, where candidates seemed unable to progress beyond a GCSE level of understanding in the Biblical concepts.

There were many very good scripts though there were significant misunderstandings of fundamental philosophical concepts among a significant number of candidates. There was also evidence that many candidates had insufficiently revised the whole specification, and had instead struggled to fit what they had revised to the question set.

For many candidates, part b) questions were difficult. Too many candidates simply listed arguments they had learned; but failed to engage with the question, either finishing with an unsupported personal belief or making no attempt to develop their own ideas. This is a skill that requires practice but is an essential academic skill. It is not enough to be able to state points of view when asked to discuss something. These questions are designed to encourage a reflective response.

A number of examiners have expressed concern about candidate's work which seems to follow a formulaic approach. Unfortunately for the candidates, this type of approach relies on examples based on previously set questions which do not necessarily contain the correct material for responses to be successful in this year's questions. There was a feeling that some content had been 'shoe-horned in' in the hope that it might become relevant. It cannot be emphasised enough that evaluation is a skill which has to be honed and not copied. Candidates should avoid 'model' answers at all costs.

It was refreshing that the overall standard of written communication showed improvement compared with recent years. Many candidates still struggle to distinguish the correct uses of *of/have/a*, sometimes using them interchangeably (as in 'could of', 'could a')

Comments on Individual Questions:

1a) Explain what is meant by Intelligent Design. [25]

Very few candidates recognised that this question was about Science and Religion. Even then, the candidates who were able to jump this hurdle seemed often to lack sufficient depth of understanding of the work of (for example) Behe. The majority of responses explained Aquinas and Paley in a range of detail. Better responses often still included a range of irrelevant material, using Aquinas, Paley, or other forms of the Teleological argument. There was often little mention of the fact that Intelligent Design claims to have found the black box about which Darwin wrote. There were some responses that thought that Intelligent Design proves the existence of the Judaeo-Christian God.

The best responses identified that Darwin had stated the conditions which would falsify his theory of slight successive modified changes passed on from generation to generation. They were able to identify the discussion of the flagellum on cilia or cilium and how this required so many combinations of specific bio-chemical elements which if either not present or organised otherwise would see the cell ceasing to fulfil its function. The analogy of the mousetrap, for example, was used to good effect at this stage to demonstrate the notion of irreducible complexity.

A significant number of candidates confused Paley's Design argument with the more modern search for Intelligent Design. A minority of candidates assumed that Intelligent Design was evolution, with Creationism as Unintelligent Design. Such responses received little credit.

1b) 'The Intelligent Design argument makes no sense.' Discuss. [10]

Given the lack of context for so many candidates, answers to this question struggled to move out of level 2. Some candidates were also unable to engage with the phrase 'no sense' and therefore their argument was often limited to being 'implicit', and therefore level 3.

The better responses were able to argue that Darwinism was supported with mountains of fossil evidence which could not simply be dismissed by apparent Intelligent Design found in examples like blood clotting and cilia. Candidates were able to demonstrate that these views were little more than pseudo-science which produced a non-empirical conclusion which was unfalsifiable.

2a) Explain Descartes' version of the Ontological argument. [25]

The conflation of Anselm and Descartes arguments was commonplace in this question. Some candidates seemed to be suggesting Descartes' argument was that because there are contingent objects in the universe, God must be necessary. Other candidates seemed to be suggesting that because a triangle has three sides God must exist as if the concept of a triangle and God are so inextricably linked one concept affects the other. Others assumed that Descartes was consciously developing the arguments of Anselm, despite the absence of any firm evidence that he was familiar with the text of Anselm's *Proslogion*.

Better candidates were able to clearly identify Descartes' argument and develop his reasoning to a good standard. However, these answers were often prefaced with the unnecessary preamble of Anselm and Gaunilo and focused on description, rather than explanation.

The best answers took ideas found in Meditations 3 and 5. Candidates were able to identify Descartes' idea that God has placed an imprint upon us, as a craftsman might leave a trademark on something he had made, then go on to suggest that some truths cannot be doubted once demonstrated. These responses then concluded that this was not meant to be an argument, but a demonstration of the existence of God. The very best responses successfully identified the mountain and valley example used by Descartes. The winged horses imagined were rarely mentioned.

Many candidates demonstrated a good understanding by explaining both existence as a perfection and as a predicate. Some struggled to explain what a predicate was, and very many were unaware of the distinctive nature of a defining predicate. Candidates would be wise to remember that 'predicate' is a grammatical term applied to describe the subject of a sentence: it is not a description of a *thing*, but of a concept.

2b) ‘Descartes has proved that a perfect God exists.’ Discuss. [10]

This question was reasonably well attempted. However, some candidates treated the question as ‘assess the ontological argument’, rather than addressing the question set, often describing Anselm and Gaunilo as a response. Better candidates were able to evaluate the criticisms of Kant, and sometimes Gassendi, without simply describing them. Kant’s 100 thalers threw up some interesting ideas, such as the suggestion that 100 real thalers can be spent and so they are better than the 100 imagined ones. This misses Kant’s point somewhat. He himself agreed that the financial aspect of the real coins would be significant but this still presupposes the existence of the said real thalers, rather than the erroneous logic found in the philosophical sleight of hand which shifts from concepts and predicates to the world of specific individual examples.

Some candidates valuably considered whether the God allegedly demonstrated by the argument would be perfect, and received credit for doing so. A few candidates validly discussed the issue of evil given that the question was on perfection. There was a lot of assertion of views at times as weaker responses struggled to engage with the concepts but had learned what the different thinkers said.

3a) Explain what is meant by ‘*creatio ex nihilo*’. [25]

This was the least popular of all the questions and the second most poorly answered. Some candidates were unable to move past a GCSE standard explanation of what happened on each day of creation. The attributes of God were linked in from time to time in the explanations but answers lost focus from the question, often becoming answers on stewardship.

Many answers approached this question with Aristotle’s Prime Mover, Aquinas’ cosmological argument and even on occasions Paley’s analogy of the watch. Candidates were often unable to distinguish between ‘*creatio ex nihilo*’ and ‘God as a craftsman’. Better candidates were able to discuss the ideas of *Divine Fiat* and the differences between the Hebrew words *bara* and *yasar* and other subtleties of the Biblical account, which is a text rich in opportunities for philosophical enquiry.

A significant number of candidates were able to define *creatio ex nihilo*, but many chose then to write pre-prepared answers outlining Aristotle’s theory of the four causes or seized an apparent opportunity simply to recount the content of Chapters 1 and 2 of *Genesis*. Better responses were able to develop both philosophical and theological implications of God creating from nothing, sometimes contrasting this with relevant material from Plato and Aristotle. The openness of the question enabled examiners also to credit other legitimate insights.

3b) ‘God should not judge us as he is responsible for the way we are.’ Discuss. [10]

This was generally well answered. There were some excellent ideas raised here making a variety of links to things like God’s role in the problem of evil, free will and responsibility for either humans or God and the notion of God as a law giver to guide human behaviour. Arguments were sustained and justified by taking a variety of approaches discussed above. Less successful responses often presented lists of statements or questions without connection to each other or reference back to the overriding discussion.

Many candidates considered whether the gift of free will would permit God to judge justly. Some considered whether predestination would be an issue and a few considered the nature of responsibility, for example asking about the extent to which a parent might be responsible for or legitimately judge a child for his conduct.

4a) Explain the theodicies of both Augustine and Irenaeus. [25]

This was a very popular question which was answered very well on the whole. Candidates still felt the need to begin their answers with a discussion of the inconsistent triad which was too long at times and, it may be argued, unnecessary. However, most candidates were able to identify the role of human free will and Genesis 3 in Augustine's theodicy. Better responses gave solid explanation of the notion of evil lacking any substance through the concept of the privation of good. Stronger answers identified the hierarchy of beings, the aesthetic principle and principles of plenitude and harmony.

Irenaeus was generally less well-known and was heavily supplemented with Hick's version of the theodicy. Few candidates were able to go beyond the image and likeness discussion. There were very few mentions of the examples Irenaeus gives in *Against Heresies* of a mother giving a baby milk until ready to accept solid food, Jonah and the Whale, and the potter and the clay analogy. Some better responses successfully distinguished between Irenaeus, who believed people were commonly consigned to hell, and Hick's Irenaean theodicy which assumed universal salvation.

4b) 'There is too much evil in the world for there to be a God.' Discuss. [10]

This question was generally very well answered and supported with a variety of forms of evidence. Weaker responses were characterised by their shopping list style answers, beginning each paragraph with the name of the philosopher that they had learned and wanted to shoehorn into their argument. This then at times led to resorting to a conclusion that one or other of Augustine, Irenaeus or Hick was most 'clear and logical' and so must be right – which does not actually answer the question set directly. At times candidates were not fully engaged with the phrase 'too much evil', perhaps offering pre-prepared answers to a problem of evil part b question. Sometimes candidates confused the ideas of evil and suffering. There were often also emotive expressions of dislike towards suffering; however much we dislike it, there might well be a purpose behind it!

The best responses constructed an argument which flowed logically from point to point, challenging the question as they moved from idea to idea rather than simple analysis by juxtaposition. In these cases, the concept of what counts as 'too much evil' was discussed in terms of natural evil or the Holocaust. The difficulty in accepting that a loving God would allow such evil to exist, while keeping his characteristic attributes, was set against the fact that God is simply not able to intervene with his creation without compromising free will.

Examiners, as always, were interested in how well candidates argued for conclusions and did not expect or require a specific response. Some candidates developed in interesting ways D.Z. Phillips' arguments against the alleged instrumentalism of Irenaean theodicies.

G572 Religious Ethics

General Comments

There were a number of good and very good responses from candidates. However, there did not seem to be quite as many top level five responses as in previous years. Candidates would benefit from thinking through how to answer fully the Part a) questions. Many clearly enjoyed the discussion questions in Part b) but often did not write enough for Part a). Candidates should remember the marks split between the Assessment Objectives and use their time appropriately.

The most popular questions appeared to be 4 and 1 followed by 3 and 2.

Comments on Specific Questions

1a) Explain, with examples, the importance Kant placed upon doing one's duty. [25]

There were a number of good responses. Some candidates were confused by the reference to "duty" in the question and tended to ignore it in favour of a general Kantian Ethics response. What Kant meant by 'duty' was explained by a number of candidates, though some were confused by duty as a response to an external authority or duty as part of the 'moral law within'.

Some candidates were able to give a number of examples to illustrate their response. Kant's own examples were given by a number of candidates to good effect, and some candidates produced interesting responses which approached this question differently, by incorporating knowledge of Kant through specific examples. Some candidates had knowledge, but limited understanding, of Kant; this was evident in the lack of examples given and the fact that they simply wrote general responses focusing on the idea of doing one's duty without explaining how this might be achieved.

1b) To what extent is doing one's duty the most important part of ethics? [10]

There were a number of very good responses which made reference to 'duty' as perceived from the point of view of Natural Law and Utilitarianism, with really good answers recognising that duty is implicitly present in all ethical systems. Some candidates ignored the wording of the question as to whether duty was '*the most important*' part of ethics. Good use was made of Ross, in particular, with the *prima Facie* duties and some candidates used this to resolve the issue of conflicts of duty.

2a) Explain how a follower of the religion you have studied might approach the issues of infertility. [25]

The responses to this question were – in general – not very good, with a large number of responses showing little development from GCSE. Some candidates showed little depth of knowledge regarding what '*issues of infertility*' might mean beyond not being able to have baby. Some candidates were able to link religious approaches to a range of issues from AIH, AID, IVF, PGD etc. Regarding religious approaches, these tended to be somewhat vague.

However, some candidates were able to make successful reference to specific points such as the story of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:14-20), the issue of whether or not ensoulment takes place in a zygote and the implications of the command in Genesis 1:22; 9:1,7 with regard to being 'fruitful'. Good responses showed the difficulty of arriving at a consensus on this topic, utilised their knowledge of the different forms of fertility treatment and used these to ask questions of the religious ethics. Good responses showing that approaches such as Natural Law can be used to argue both for and against fertility treatment.

2b) ‘The right to a child is not an absolute right.’ Discuss. [10]

A number of candidates made successful reference to the question of Human Rights and the right to having a family – however that might be interpreted. Some candidates were able to contrast this approach well with the concept of child as gift. Here again, candidates might be discouraged from making over-trivial points or simplistic generalisations. Added to which a number of candidates did not spot the ‘absolute’ reference in the question and produced arguments that were generally around whether people have the right to a child.

Unfortunately, there were again some candidates who confused the focus of the question, and wrote about the right of the child to survive through application to abortion.

3a) Explain how the concept of the ‘Quality of Life’ might be applied to euthanasia. [25]

The responses to this question were – in general – not very good. Surprisingly few candidates were able to give little more than cursory examples of what Quality of Life might involve. This tended to hamper the development of the responses made. Some candidates simply explained the different forms of euthanasia with a passing reference to the Quality of Life with little explanation of the concept or arguments. Some simply wrote out case studies to show that certain people, such as Diane Pretty, had no Quality of Life. Many responses focused on the *absence* of Quality of Life being seen in those suffering from MND or in PVS.

Some candidates were able to discuss how Quality of Life might be seen as involving personhood or possessing attributes such as consciousness, independence, awareness and rationality. Some effectively used Mary Anne Warren, James Rachels, Mill and Singer in discussing the different concepts of personhood and how this might apply to the Quality of Life. There were some good answers in which candidates also discussed the approaches of Utilitarianism and Natural Law and used the idea of QALYs as a contrast with the sanctity of Life.

This question called for candidates to produce a response wherein the concept of Quality of Life was clearly linked to euthanasia and some were not fully able to do this.

3b) ‘The ‘Sanctity of Life’ is the most important issue when considering euthanasia.’ Discuss. [10]

There were a number of good responses which successfully contrasted Sanctity of Life with Quality of Life. Here too, however, candidates might have benefited from giving a little more explanation as to what Sanctity of Life might mean in terms of respect for the dignity of the person created in the image of God, for example.

However, on the whole, even candidates who did not produce a good answer to part a) managed to produce a balanced response showing both the strengths and weaknesses of considering the Sanctity of Life as the most important consideration. Most candidates, therefore, produced a convincing and successful argument, although few recognised that the concepts of the Sanctity of Life and the Quality of Life are not mutually exclusive. Unfortunately, some candidates continued to write sweeping and generalised assertions decrying the Sanctity of Life as outmoded and only relevant to religion, with little in the way of supporting argument or evidence.

4a) Explain the main principles of the classical forms of Utilitarianism. [25]

The key issue appeared to be that some candidates were not completely sure which were the ‘classical forms of Utilitarianism’. That being said, even with regard to those who were familiar with Bentham and Mill, there was still an issue in terms of how much detail candidates knew. In the case of Bentham, some good levels of knowledge were apparent regarding the Hedonic Calculus and the concept of pleasure being the only good and pain being the only evil. Weaker responses simply listed the Hedonic Calculus (often only partially) with no explanation of the concepts and no exemplification to show understanding.

Mill was generally covered well, with good explanations of higher and lower pleasures and a number of variations around the happiness of pigs and varying philosophers. Candidates generally comprehending understanding of how Mill developed Bentham's system, however, candidates might again benefit from avoiding trivial examples in discussing Mill's more nuanced version of Bentham's theory.

Some candidates showed superficial knowledge of Mill with not many making reference to his concept of "competent judges" or the importance of the role played by society in establishing what causes the greatest happiness.

Many candidates made unnecessary reference to Singer and Preference Utilitarianism.

4b) 'Utilitarianism is not a good guide for resolving ethical dilemmas.' Discuss. [10]

This was generally well answered by most candidates with many producing balanced responses showing both the strengths and weaknesses of the system, often contrasting it with other deontological systems such as Kantian ethics. Some candidates tended to ignore the wording of the question as to Utilitarianism being 'a good guide for resolving ethical dilemmas' and discussed instead which theory they favoured. However, in general this question elicited the most convincing and successful arguments from candidates with good use of examples to illustrate their answers.

G573 Jewish Scriptures

General Comments

The majority of candidates addressed the questions appropriately. There were some very good responses from those who supported their points with accurate quotations and close reference to the texts, and answers were clear and focused to the question. Less successful responses tended to disregard the command word 'Explain,' and lapsed into narrative or description. Some candidates succumbed to the temptation to show the examiner everything that they knew on the topic.

Most candidates demonstrated good essay-writing skills and nearly all answers covered a sensible length. In the main, handwriting was legible and clear. Some candidates repeated themselves in their answers and would have benefited from planning their response before starting the answer.

There were no rubric infringements.

Comments on Individual Questions

1a) Explain the differences between the covenants G-d made with Adam and with Jeremiah. [25]

The question was generally well done. Some candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of the view of critical biblical scholarship that the covenant with Adam is the work of the post-exilic Priestly writer. Some included useful discussion of the features that indicate a covenantal relation between G-d and Adam. Many candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the context in which Jeremiah was writing. Several made reference to the understanding of the new covenant in Christian thought.

1b) 'The covenants with Adam and Jeremiah have nothing in common.' Discuss. [10]

The question elicited many good responses. Most candidates argued that while the Adamic covenant is between G-d and humanity, the covenant with Jeremiah is between G-d and the Jews. Others argued that neither covenant can be viewed as exclusive: the covenant with Adam is not simply between G-d and Adam, nor is the covenant with Jeremiah simply between G-d and Jeremiah. Some maintained that G-d's love for humanity and His desire that men and women flourish is clearly shown in both covenants.

2a) Explain the features of Genesis 1:26 – 30 which led some scholars to describe these verses as a covenant between G-d and Adam. [25]

The best responses were chiefly characterised by thorough knowledge of the actual verses of the set text. Many candidates began by explaining their understanding of 'covenant' in terms of promise or agreement. Several answers demonstrated good knowledge of the background of the Biblical usage of covenant in Ancient Near Eastern treaties. Some emphasised the conditions imposed on Adam and likened them to a suzerainty treaty. Most explained the covenant features in the set text in terms of G-d's expectations of humanity and the blessings received.

2b) 'Genesis 1:26 – 30 loses all significance unless it is accepted as historically true.' Discuss. [10]

The majority opinion was that even if a literal interpretation of Genesis 1.26-30 is not accepted, truths can still be learned. Some agreed with the statement, arguing that if G-d was not active in the covenant then humanity has no obligation to keep it. Others maintained that unless the verses are accepted as historically true, belief in G-d as Creator is negated.

3a) Compare the teachings about suffering in the books of Jonah and Job. [25]

The question produced some thoughtful responses. Most candidates viewed the book of Job both as an attempt to deal with the question of undeserved suffering, and as an exploration into G-d's dealings with people. Most explained the book of Jonah in terms of God's forgiveness after genuine repentance, and His sovereign rule. Several candidates discussed issues of authorship, and there was good discussion of the book of Jonah as a post-exilic reflection emphasising G-d's mercy to all nations and thereby implicitly opposing Jewish exclusivism. Weaker responses tended to tell the story of how Job and Jonah suffered.

3b) Assess which types of literature might best describe the books of Jonah and Job. [10]

Nearly all candidates based the discussion on their ideas about the teachings and purposes of the writers given in the first part of the question. Many categorised the book of Job as Wisdom literature, frequently arguing the advice and common sense contained within the text, a characteristic of the genre. Most described the book of Jonah as Myth, often citing fantastical elements in the story such as the prophet surviving three days in the belly of the fish. Several candidates argued that both books would fit more than one category when viewed from the perspective of Form Criticism.

4a) Explain the significant features of the experience of Elijah on Mount Horeb. [25]

The question was well done, although a handful of candidates confused Horeb with Carmel and confined their answer to the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Most responses included a summary of the context of the flight to Horeb, and a good number provided introductory explanation about Elijah. In the best responses, candidates explored parallels with Moses going to Horeb/Sinai in explaining why Elijah went to that particular place to seek G-d. Several candidates included discussion of the purpose of the Deuteronomistic History. Many candidates omitted the commission to anoint Hazael, Jehu and Elisha in their responses.

4b) To what extent did Elijah learn more about the power of G-d on Mount Horeb than he did on Mount Carmel? [10]

Most candidates argued that Elijah formed a deeper and more intimate relationship with G-d on Horeb. Some argued for the contest on Carmel being the greater learning experience in that Elijah witnessed the power and omnipotence of G-d as L-rd of Nature. Some candidates argued that Elijah also learned that G-d was a merciful G-d on Carmel because He did not punish Israel for her syncretism.

G574 New Testament

General Comments

Many candidates answered the questions confidently and coherently and the overall performance was commensurate with the candidates' range of ability. In general, candidates who were sure of their subject knowledge gave an equally good performance on both parts (a) and (b) of questions. Most candidates were able to use their knowledge and understanding of the prescribed texts effectively to structure and support their explanations and provide evidence for arguments. Other candidates relied on a less accurate understanding of the text and too general a knowledge of gospel events, which often included selection of text from the wrong gospel.

Comments on Individual Questions

1a) Explain the way in which women are presented in Mark's Passion Narrative. [25]

Candidates who used a range of text from Mark's passion narrative, highlighting the role of women, produced the most successful answers and many contrasted the role of women with that of the disciples. Some candidates made a less comprehensive selection of events and, in some cases, limited their achievement by their selection and inaccurate knowledge of the text.

1b) 'Women are not portrayed as real characters in Mark's Gospel.' Discuss. [10]

Some excellent and very good answers to this question displayed detailed and perceptive arguments; where candidates analysed Mark's characterisation of women and whether they were anything more than a literary device or two dimensional figures. A range of evidence about the actions of the women, their names and the frequency of their appearance in the gospel(s) was discussed. The majority of the weaker responses misunderstood the question and argued whether women were important or not.

2a) Explain the significance of the Last Supper in Mark's Gospel. [25]

The most successful responses concentrated on all the events of the Last Supper in Mark 14: 12-26 and the relevance to Christian teaching and practice. Many understood the importance of the prediction of betrayal and death and the symbolism of the bread and the wine, but were less sure about, or, omitted the reference to the Kingdom of God in verse 25. Some candidates made Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial the focus of their answer and this event did not happen until after the Last Supper.

2b) 'Evidence in Mark's Gospel of a link between the Last Supper and Passover is weak.' Discuss. [10]

Responses to this question varied. Good answers were familiar with the debate about the possible links between Passover and the Last Supper and the best answers were straightforward arguments showing the case for and against the statement in the question. Some candidates showed very good understanding of modern scholarship on this issue. Other candidates had some understanding of the key areas of comparison between the two but were unable to use the information coherently to form arguments.

3a) Explain the role of the Pharisees in first-century Judaism. [25]

Generally, answers to this question were consistently good with many candidates quoting from scholars and historical sources such as Josephus to validate the information. Evidence of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was often used to illustrate points and most understood the importance of the Pharisees after the destruction of the Temple in A.D.70. Satisfactory answers differed only in the amount of detail included.

3b) 'Jesus' conflict with the Jewish authorities caused his death.' Discuss. [10]

Candidates answered this question with enthusiasm and many wrote at length. The best answers were those which took into account the responsibility of all those who were involved in the last days of Jesus and were able to balance a wide variety of evidence relating to the possible causes of his death. Some candidates ignored the intervention of the Roman authorities. Many did take into account that Jesus was destined to die as part of a divine plan.

4a) Explain the distinctive features of Jesus' resurrection appearance on The Walk to Emmaus. [25]

The candidates who chose this question were usually confident in their knowledge of Luke's account of the Walk to Emmaus and most explanations of the significance of this resurrection appearance were detailed and thorough. The best answers were able to show the juxtaposition between the recognition of Jesus in the breaking of the bread and the Eucharist. Some of the weaker responses would have been improved by better knowledge of the text.

4b) Assess how successful, as a teaching, The Walk to Emmaus would be if it were the only account of the resurrection in Luke's gospel. [10]

This question was answered best by candidates who were able to relate the account of the Walk to Emmaus to other resurrection appearances in Luke or other specified texts. Candidates who experienced difficulty in constructing a coherent answer often did not explore this perspective or Luke's wider purposes.

G575 Developments in Christian Theology

General Comments

In general all questions were answered well; Part a) questions were probably less well answered than Part b) questions. Candidates did need to read the question carefully and focus on the precise issues in the question; there were a number of very general responses in which candidates wrote all they knew about a topic rather than letting the question dictate the response.

It is pleasing to see an improvement in evaluative responses (part b) questions) – particularly good answers were the ones which balanced technical knowledge with personal insight. Nevertheless, it is still the case that some candidates needed to construct more of an argument; two differing opinions without any assessment is not enough to gain high marks.

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

Comments on Individual Questions

1a) Explain what problems the search for the historical Jesus poses for theology. [25]

This was not a popular question. There were many general answers which gave a history of the 'Quest for the Historical Jesus' and/or focused on Cone. Some read this as 'what is the difference between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history' rather than the problems the Quest poses for theology.

Nevertheless, it was clear that some candidates had revised this topic well and their answers highlighted how a discovery of the historical Jesus cast doubts on the authenticity of: miracles, the crucifixion and messianic claims. Many referred to Bultmann but some were unclear how demythologising was problematic, and why in fact Bultmann favoured the Christ of faith. Good answers also discussed the problem of Jesus as the failed apocalyptic messiah and Wrede's 'messianic secret' solution.

Candidates who pursued the historical aspect of Cone's Christology (or indeed any Jesus the liberator quest) pointed out that this presented a very political Jesus which challenged traditional notions of salvation.

1b) 'If we know who the historical Jesus was then we can know if Christianity is true.' Discuss. [10]

There were many general answers on the Jesus of history versus the Christ of faith. Good answers were able to make the distinction between faith-revelation and history-facts. Some did argue that Christianity is based on historical events and so the question is ultimately true. Some very good answers employed Cone's approach that without knowledge of history the claims of Christianity would be entirely subjective and lack particularity (the problem of 'white' theology). Other candidates impressively dealt with the problem of Christian truth claims and reflected on whether these need necessarily be grounded in a particular moment of history to be the basis of faith.

2a) Explain Aquinas' teaching on God's relationship to humans. [25]

This was a popular question; it was clear that although many candidates knew about Aquinas' use of Aristotle, fewer knew how this related to the God-human relationship. Many mentioned Aquinas' reliance on Aristotle's four causes but only the best were able to articulate, in detail, how Aquinas adapted these to God's relationship to humans (eg God as the efficient cause of all matter and initial cause of humans *ex nihilo*; formal cause as the *imago Dei*; the human *telos* to worship God and be united in his love). Good answers discussed the place of angels in the 'chain of being' and the means by which God communicates his will to humans and therefore the way in which angels (as incorporeal or 'separated substances') are similar but different from humans (materially and formally). Weaker responses did not use this opportunity to make the connection and therefore failed to engage fully with the question.

Weaker responses also tended to write out the Genesis accounts without reference to Aquinas, and some confused him with Calvin's teaching. Many used Augustine's teaching on human nature and although much of this could be credited, it could not gain high marks unless specifically located in Aquinas' theology.

2b) 'Science clearly proves that humans are not unique.' Discuss. [10]

There were some good and imaginative answers to this question. The standard response was that evolution proves humans are not unique but Christianity says we are because we are created in the image of God. Some went on to challenge the notion of 'unique' and argued that science, genetics in particular, proved that humans as individuals are unique (reference to the human finger print was widely used here). Weaker answers argued that as all humans suffer from Original Sin, then no one is unique as all human exist in the same condition; this would have been fine had these candidates taken time to define and consider what they meant by unique.

3a) Explain how the situation of land and wealth in Latin America gave rise to liberation theology. [25]

This was a very popular question and was answered in a wide variety of ways. Weaker answers wrote about liberation theology in general and linked its origins to the 'situation of land and wealth' in very unspecific and general terms.

Better candidates had a deeper understanding of the precise origins of liberation theology and wrote in detail about how the political situation of land and wealth (from colonisation through to 19th century independence followed by 20th century political development) gave rise to liberation theology in the early 1960s. Candidates explained how these conditions and widespread exploitation of the land led to 'structural sin' which the Church, as much as the powerful landowners, had created. Good answers were therefore able to describe how the CELAM meetings at Medellin and Puebla raised awareness of these injustices and challenged clergy and the Church in general to look at the 'underside of history' and develop a 'preferential option for the poor'.

Many discussed the challenges from Marxist and communist groups. Some excellent answers considered Gutierrez's critique of developmentalism and how foreign aid (and US trade policies) had created a culture of dependency.

Many candidates outlined how liberation theology's two-act praxis (and mediations) responded to the situation but to access the top bands this needed to be related to the historical conditions of the time. Some good answers did so and referred to the theme of land and exploitation with particular reference to Exodus, Amos and Isaiah.

3b) 'No one should have private ownership of land.' Discuss. [10]

Many candidates rehearsed Marxist views on private property as a fundamental cause of alienation, false consciousness and exploitation. Weaker responses did not offer a critique of Marx but simply contrasted it with liberation views of land and ownership. Better candidates were able to discuss private property and its important place in capitalist societies and the human psychological need to feel that territory is one's own. Many discussed the virtues and vices of competition and the part played by ownership of property, whether private or public.

4a) Explain the impact and influence of liberation theology outside Latin America. [25]

This was not a popular question and was often poorly done; some candidates used it as a means of explaining liberation in general but they rarely ventured outside Latin America.

Very few candidates knew much about liberation theology outside Latin America and whilst many referred to Dalit theology, some to South African black theology and others to gay liberation, in each case (other than stating the obvious) few had very specific knowledge of the details. Those who chose to explain Cone's black theology in the USA fared much better; some knew that his theology in some respects developed independently from Latin America.

Some candidates pursued the question in a different but acceptable way by considering the impact and influence of liberation theology on the Vatican and discussed the official Roman Catholic responses, in particular its scepticism of liberation theology's Marxist materialism.

4b) Assess the view that conscientisation is central to all theologies of liberation. [10]

Many were able to argue for the importance of conscientisation but struggled to find an alternative central issue probably because they didn't know enough about other theologies of liberation. Good answers proposed alternatives such as praxis or solidarity or the establishment of base communities. Others proposed other aspects of Marxism such as its critique of history, dialectic and reversal.

Most candidates concluded that conscientisation is fundamental to all liberative theologies because without it the poor or the marginalised fail to realise their own self worth as human subjects. Without this basic starting point nothing else is possible. Some candidates discussed the ideas of Paulo Freire to support their answers.

G576 Buddhism

General Comments

All questions were attempted. There were very few rubric errors. Candidates showed a good understanding of the specification, making good use of the technical terminology, and employed a range of scholarly views. Most obvious were ideas from Harvey and from Cush. Candidates' responses were, on the whole, well structured although there are still some who choose to evaluate ideas in part a) responses when it is not required.

Comments on Individual Questions

1a) Explain the three aspects of the trikaya doctrine. [25]

This was one of the less popular questions. Candidates on the whole understood the trikaya doctrine. Some showed a really good understanding and included the symbolic imagery to show these aspects (rainbow, or sun in a cloudless sky for instance). Others showed how the three aspects link to other concepts within Buddhism, such as the Bodhisattva path, an understanding of nirvana and Buddha-nature (tathagatagarbha). The level of technical terminology used was generally very high, with good understanding. A few candidates mistook the trikaya doctrine for the three refuges and even though some wrote excellent detailed responses these could not be fully credited.

1b) 'The trikaya doctrine is wrong because it makes the Buddha seem like a god.' Discuss. [10]

Some candidates answered this question by comparing the trikaya with the Christian doctrine of Holy Trinity. This produced a good discussion and drew out some interesting parallels. Other candidates looked at the idea of the attributes associated with each body and discussed if each one made the Buddha appear like a god.

2a) Explain the importance of the vinaya rules for the monastic sangha. [25]

This was a popular question. The vast majority of candidates who responded to this question had a good understanding of the vinaya rules and could explain and exemplify them. Some only talked about the five precepts and this restricted their answers somewhat. Others did not show why the rules were important and therefore did not gain as much credit. Good responses talked about the patimokkha and how this was used; some went further, to show how it is used to reinforce the importance of the rules for the maintenance of the four fold sangha. Answers which addressed this fundamental aspect of the vinaya rules tended to gain higher marks than ones which did not draw this out. Some candidates spent time evaluating the merits of the vinaya rules and, as this was not asked for in the question, they gained little or no credit for their efforts. Candidates must remember that AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) questions only require explanation and exemplification, not evaluation.

2b) 'A good Buddhist should find it easy to follow the vinaya rules.' Discuss. [10]

Some responses focused on the vinaya rules too superficially and only said why they might be hard or easy to follow. Better responses looked at *why* they might be easy or hard to follow and then showed why a Buddhist could be good and still find them hard to follow. Very good responses also discussed what it meant to be a good Buddhist, and used the example of a Bodhisattva who might be a good Buddhist but not follow the vinaya rules if it helped others to gain enlightenment (ie upaya).

3a) Explain how the social and economic conditions at the time of the Buddha led to challenges to the existing religious beliefs in India. [25]

This was not as popular as question 2 or 4, and was, on the whole, not done as well as the others. Most responses showed some understanding of the historical background at the time of the Buddha but only at a superficial level. Candidates tended to focus on urbanisation within the Ganges plain and the conflict between the top two castes (Brahmins and Kshatriyas). Some mentioned the move away from animal sacrifice which had become less popular as a commodity market in animals grew in urbanised areas. Some focused on the different religious groups which were practicing at the time of the Buddha especially the samana movement. Better responses mentioned the development in ideas from the Rig Veda to the Upanishads. Very few questioned the dates given for the Buddha and the debate over these which may have influenced their response to part b).

3b) To what extent do the Buddha's teachings reflect the wider cultural changes occurring in India during his lifetime? [10]

Most responses focused on the fact that the Buddha wanted to move away from the prevailing Hinduism characterised by the caste system and sacrificial worship. Some candidates used the ideas from different ideas from the samana movements to show which aspect the Buddha used and which he rejected. Some did this in terms of a discussion of the Buddha's journey to enlightenment. Candidates might have looked at the debate over the dates given for the life of the historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gotama) and shown that earlier dates may have preceded the Upanishads. If that is so, the Buddha could have been part of an earlier movement, culminating in these views or later dates could show that he was more influenced by these ideas than by a reaction against Vedic beliefs.

4a) Explain how the three poisons keep the wheel of samsara in motion. [25]

This was a popular question. Weaker responses demonstrated a superficial knowledge of samsara based solely on the Tibetan wheel of life, which was described without really focusing on the question. These responses tended to see the three fires just as part of this diagram rather than the fundamental causal reasons for its continued existence. Better responses showed how each one individually led to keeping the wheel of samsara in motion. The better responses showed how the three fires linked to other concepts within Buddhism ie Four Noble Truths, Eight Fold Path, and Three Marks of Existence.

4b) To what extent can it be argued that delusion leads to greed and hatred? [10]

This question was answered well with most candidates presenting the argument that one leads to the others, so any of them could be seen to be the most important. The better responses suggested that delusion about ultimate truth leads to all suffering as well as greed and hatred (as specific examples of dukkha).

G577 Hinduism

General Comments

Although the entry was small there was a full range of ability represented. However, it was disappointing to find a number of totally blank scripts.

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

There were no rubric errors.

A lot of 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 part b) responses in general and particularly in questions 1b) and 4b).

Comments on Individual Questions

1a) Explain the importance of the ashramas in the varnashramadharma system. [25]

Candidates had to consider carefully how to best use their knowledge, in order to maximise their marks, by avoiding repetition when answering parts a) and b) to good effect ; some candidates simply repeated themselves without any real attempt to evaluate or analyse the material. Part a) differentiated well, with candidates at all levels able to give a reasonable account of the varnashramadharma system and more able candidates then proceeding to assess the relative importance of its components. It was disappointing that very few candidates seemed able to employ correct Sanskrit terms for the different ashramas (although correct English equivalents were acceptable), however, almost all were able to do so for the varnas.

1b) 'Ashrama is less important than varna in the varnashramadharma system.' Discuss. [10]

In part b) many candidates were restricted in their response to comments already made in part a). A significant number referenced maya, by arguing that it means varnashramadharma cannot matter because it is illusory. At best this can only be an overly simplistic understanding of the concept, while a number of candidates expounded on this theme sufficiently to demonstrate a total misunderstanding concept.

2a) Explain how and why Hindus might worship one of the Trimurti. [25]

No comment felt necessary.

2b) To what extent can it be argued that Brahma is the most important member of the Trimurti? [10]

Candidates attempted this question in one of two ways. Some selected one of the Trimurti upon which to focus whilst the majority viewed the reference to one in more general terms. Either interpretation was felt to be valid, although it did mean that some responses were lacking in depth and detail because the breadth of material to be covered was so much greater.

3a) Explain how the Vedas show the importance of the deities. [25]

Undoubtedly the least popular question. To answer it well, candidates needed a real familiarity with, and depth of knowledge of, the content of the Vedas. Candidates who had not read at least sections of the texts were left with general comments about the relative importance of smriti and shruti scriptures, or the significance that comes with age and this, whilst relevant, was not by itself sufficient to constitute a top level answer.

3b) 'Only deities mentioned in the Vedas are truly worthy of worship.' Discuss. [10]

Even candidates with ample knowledge for part a) struggled more with part b). The nature of the statement and the command words employed implied even a basic answer had to be evaluative, which worked in the candidates favour to a degree. However, a complete answer required a degree of personal engagement with or response to, the concept of worship and the question of what is worthy. Candidates appeared unprepared for this.

4a) Explain the similarities and differences between Brahman and atman. [25]

This was a popular question. Candidates had to consider carefully how to best use their knowledge, in order to maximise their marks, by avoiding repetition when answering parts a) and b) to good effect. The question it was intrinsically challenging since, to deal adequately with both elements (similarities and differences), candidates needed to draw together several strands of their studies. Most managed a better account of one than the other., However, some were able to correctly reference Sankara and Ramanuja, which they are not required to be able to do at this level.

4b) 'Brahman has nothing in common with atman.' Discuss. [10]

Candidates found part b) a challenging question, since none of the philosophical schools of Hinduism with which candidates are expected to be familiar would support this statement. Although opposing views are not a requirement either of the levels of response or of a meaningful discussion, this did 'throw' candidates who were aware of it, while candidates who were not aware of it tended to repeat the material from part a) without significant addition or change of application.

G578 Islam

General Comments

The general standard of the responses was similar to previous years, however, there were a slightly higher proportion of candidates writing top level answers. A significant number of candidates did not fully appreciate the wording of the questions. This has a clear affect on how far candidates are able to access different levels, and for these candidates, greater attention needs to be paid to this.

Questions 1, 3 and 4 were the most popular although there were still a large number of candidates who opted for question 2. Overall part b) answers were not generally as well answered as the part a) questions. This would seem to indicate that some candidates need to work on improving their evaluative skills.

Comments on Individual Questions

1a) Explain what Surah 1 and Surah 96 teach about Allah. [25]

This was probably the most popular question. The majority of the candidates appeared to have a sound to good understanding of the contents of both surahs. There were some excellent responses and these demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of both Surah 1 and Surah 96. Candidates were able to extract those teachings which specifically related to our understanding of Allah. While it was not necessary for the candidates to focus equally on both surahs they did need to discuss both, to some extent, in order to get the higher levels. The weaker responses were those which either failed to deal with both of the surahs, or those which seemed to have a fairly superficial knowledge of the contents of both.

b) Assess the view that Surah 1 and Surah 96 contain all that is needed to be a Muslim. [10]

Very few candidates engaged with this question at the highest level. The majority of responses referred to some reasons as to why people may agree that the surahs do contain all that is needed to be a Muslim. However, a large number offered little disagreement with some failing to present an opposing argument. A small number of candidates did fully appreciate the wording of the question and in doing so demonstrated excellent evaluative skills.

2a) Explain the significance, importance and uniqueness of Muhammad ﷺ for Muslims. [25]

This was the least popular question and was, arguably, not dealt with as well as the others. The weaker candidates for this question were those who primarily wrote a narrative of the life of Muhammad ﷺ and therefore addressed the question as a general topic rather than the specific question. A large proportion of candidates did explain the significance, importance and uniqueness of Muhammad ﷺ as a Prophet but did not relate it directly to Muslims. There were, however, a number of extremely good responses which clearly explained the significance, importance and uniqueness of Muhammad ﷺ for Muslims both historically and in the present day.

b) 'The social and political environment within which Muhammad ﷺ lived is not important when studying Islam.' Discuss. [10]

There were some interesting discussions for this question. A number of candidates were able to show effectively how an understanding of the social and political environment of the time could enhance knowledge when studying Islam. In addition to this, they were able to offer equally convincing arguments as to why it is not important. A larger proportion of candidates, however, were unable to fully engage with the question. They focused purely on the importance of the social and political environment during Muhammad's ﷺ lifetime ignoring the idea of how it can contribute to the study of Islam. As a result of this, only a small number of candidates actually reached the highest levels for their evaluative skills.

3a) Explain the significant features of Salat-ul-Jumu'ah for Muslims. [25]

This was another popular question. The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate a good understanding of the main features of Salat-ul-Jumu'ah. The better candidates picked up on themes such as equality and focused on the purpose and importance of the khutbah and did so to a good level. Weaker candidates did not recognise Salat-ul-Jumu'ah as the Friday prayer and answered the question on salah in general terms. These candidates were, generally, unable to achieve higher than Level 2.

b) To what extent is performing salah the most difficult part of being a Muslim in any country? [10]

Most of the candidates answering this question addressed the issue of the regularity and timing of salah as the main difficulty, and were able to appreciate that it may be more problematic to perform in non-Muslim countries. Many candidates focused purely on the difficulties of performing salah in non-Muslim, as opposed to Muslim, countries and this was an acceptable way of addressing the question. The best responses, however, also compared salah with other practices a Muslim is expected to perform. Weaker arguments in response to this question tended to be those used to demonstrate why salah may not be the most difficult part of being a Muslim.

4a) Explain the structure and status of the Qur'an. [25]

A large number of candidates answered this question but, on the whole, they tended to do so less comprehensively than required. The weaker responses were mainly narrative and also focused less on the status of the Qur'an than the structure. Those candidates who did address the status did so at a more superficial level, examining such practices of the handling of the Qur'an – a very simplified interpretation. Better candidates were able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the status of the Qur'an, including how it forms the basis of Shari'ah law, as well as being able to give a good explanation of the structure.

b) 'Without the Qur'an Islam would not have survived.' Discuss. [10]

The majority of candidates who answered this question made a reasonable attempt of offering arguments in support of the quote. However, quite a significant number of candidates failed to address the other side of the argument. There were a few excellent responses which engaged fully with question and offered a variety of arguments for both sides.

G579 Judaism

General Comments

There were some excellent responses from candidates who showed an impressive range and depth of knowledge, and whose answers were clear and focused to the question. Less successful responses introduced material with less understanding and discrimination. In a number of instances, candidates would have been more successful had they planned their answer, and worked out what points were of relevance before writing down a response. Candidates should be advised that when they express a personal opinion to part b) questions, their opinion needs to be supported by evidence. They should be discouraged from unnecessary introductions such as 'I will explain the importance of the home in Jewish religious life.'

Overall, standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar were good; however, a small number of candidates wrote without the use of paragraphs, making it more difficult to produce cogent and convincing responses. While most candidates appeared to manage their time well, a minority did not consider the marks available to each question, and spent too long on part b) answers. There were no rubric infringements.

Comments on Individual Questions

1a) Explain the continuing development of the Talmud since its sixth-century CE compilation. [25]

The responses of less well prepared candidates were often limited to the reasons for a written collection of oral laws and discussion of the work of the tannaim and the amoraim in the compilation of the Talmud. Several candidates included useful discussion of the work of the codifiers; notably, Maimonides and Joseph Caro. In the best responses, candidates discussed the ways in which the Talmud continues to direct thought and action in today's world, including the importance of responsa to contemporary legal questions.

1b) 'The Talmud is no more than a book about Jewish life and law written by rabbis.' Discuss. [10]

The question elicited good discussion. Some argued that the Talmud's significance is dependent on whether or not the Jew believes that Torah, both Oral and Written, was given by G-d at Sinai. Some argued that the statement in the question implies that the Talmud is limited in the range of its scope. Other argued that the statement diminishes the importance of rabbis as those who are 'closest to G-d'.

2a) Explain the importance of the Written Torah for Jewish belief and life today. [25]

Nearly all candidates accepted the traditional view of the Written Torah as the Five Books of Moses given to the Jewish people by G-d at Sinai. Most candidates focused discussion on the importance of the Written Torah as the primary source of halakhah, and the ways in which the legal teachings guide Jewish belief and behaviour today. Many emphasised the importance of the Written Torah for Israel's status as a 'holy nation' and the 'chosen people' concept. In a minority of cases, candidates understood the term Written Torah to apply to the entire corpus of the Tenakh. Some confused the Written Torah with the Talmud.

2b) ‘The Torah should be written and read in Hebrew.’ Discuss. [10]

Almost all candidates attempted a two-sided response to this question. Some argued that Hebrew is the language of the ancient people of Israel and of the Hebrew Bible, and that the use of the vernacular might take away from the meaning of the text. Some argued that Hebrew maintains that ‘closeness with G-d’ which would otherwise be lost. Some argued that use of the vernacular means that all Jews can understand what is written.

3a) Explain the origins and observance of Shavuot. [25]

Most candidates showed knowledge and understanding of the dual significance of Shavuot: it is the second of the pilgrim festivals marking the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest; it is the commemoration of the revelation of the Torah at Sinai. In general, candidates discussed the observances of the festival in terms of its commemorative aspect, including the custom of spending the entire Shavuot night studying Torah. Some erroneously supposed that the observance of Shavuot is unimportant for Progressive Judaism. Few candidates showed awareness of the Reform movement’s Confirmation services on Shavuot which reaffirm the participation of teenagers in Judaism.

3b) To what extent is Shavuot the least important of the Pilgrim Festivals? [10]

Most candidates argued that Shavuot cannot be the least important of the Pilgrim Festivals as it commemorates the giving of the Torah at Sinai, and the Torah is the fundamental source of all Judaism. Some argued that Shavuot is less significant than Passover and Sukkot as it lasts for just two days; the others are eight-day festivals, and Jews have to devote more time to them. Some argued that all three Pilgrim Festivals are equally important since all three are commanded in the Torah.

4a) Explain the importance of the home in Jewish religious life. [25]

Most candidates emphasised the importance of the home in transmitting the traditional values of Judaism and in creating a Jewish outlook on life. Many explained that Jewish life is largely centred on the home, particularly on Sabbaths and festivals. Nearly all candidates discussed the importance of a Jewish kitchen and other aspects of Jewish living – notably, the laws of family purity – which aid the individual on the road to holiness. A handful of candidates supposed that the home is more important for the religious life of Orthodox Jews than it is for Progressive Jews.

4b) To what extent is the home more important than the synagogue in preserving Jewish religious life? [10]

Most candidates argued the importance of the home over the synagogue in strengthening Judaism and its teachings. Some explained that most of the mitzvot are carried out in the home. Others argued the importance of the synagogue for communal worship and fellowship. Some argued the many activities that take place in the synagogue and which unite Jews.

G581 Philosophy of Religion

General Comments

This question paper produced many interesting answers, but too many candidates attempted to answer questions different from those set. There were signs that some candidates had not adequately revised the entire specification. This was especially apparent in questions 1 and 4. In the first instance, many had clearly not revised symbolic uses of language, while it was clear in question 4 that many hoped to get by on a miracles question by writing quantities of inaccurate material on Hume.

Some candidates penalised themselves by indifferent use of English and too many had paid insufficient attention to the grammar of philosophical argument. Also, some candidates felt it sufficient to insert just one paragraph which is relevant to the question, before juxtaposing a good deal of material that could have been related to the question, but was not, and was certainly not required in as much detail as was present.

There were a handful of answers which were so difficult to read that examiners could not fully understand the content or argument. Such answers were marked on what could be read only. It may be advisable to suggest a scribe or transcript in such cases of bad hand-writing. Those candidates affected may find their results are not up to expectations – however, examiners can only mark what can be read.

Comments on individual questions:

1) ‘Symbolic language is the best way to talk about God.’ Discuss. [35]

This was a very popular question.

The majority of candidates who chose this question had only a passing knowledge of symbol and were really looking for a question on Religious Language in general. Most of them had some knowledge of Aquinas, Via Negativa, Verification and Falsification principles and Language Games but too many knew little on Tillich and symbol. There was often some knowledge of his ideas on differences between sign and symbol, though many failed to recognise that participation means more than just a range of subjective feelings. After all, the United States would be a different thing without the Stars and Stripes. Many gave examples such as the cross, poppies, and swastikas, but relatively few explicitly tied their understanding to *language*, as Tillich does. Some explicitly and incorrectly argued that symbols were nothing to do with words. Many were also unaware that Tillich himself had considered the issue of symbols changing their meaning or dying. Some muddled myth and/or metaphor with symbol, and surprising numbers thought Bultmann a great enthusiast for the significance of myth.

The quality of argument was frequently poor. Examiners do not require a listing of every theory - better responses understood the simple point that if one alternative view of language could be demonstrated to be superior to symbol, that, by itself, would demonstrate that symbol was not the best way. The feature of all of the best responses was the exploration and analysis of the idea that language is symbolic, comparing it precisely with one or two relevant other aspects of the topic. Weaker candidates were able to say which approach to Religious Language they preferred, but with little justification and less analysis.

2) To what extent does Boethius succeed in proving that the Christian God is just? [35]

This was not a very popular question. Many candidates who chose to attempt it were able to show very good knowledge of Boethius' view of simultaneous presence and different types of necessity, comparing these well with other models of God.

Those candidates who did not fully understand Boethius seemed to leave out the idea of necessity, which is surprising given its centrality for the understanding of our free will. A number of candidates attempted to try to link in the idea of middle knowledge, although were not fully sure what this was, or whether Boethius had it himself. However, it was pleasing to see some extremely precise answers to this question.

There was evidence of some candidates having a good grasp of simple and conditional necessity. Swinburne appeared frequently and was generally well considered. Some answers dwelt too much on the 'Problem of Evil' and lost their way. A significant number of responses rested on discussion of the philosophical problems with a timeless God – including petitionary prayer, miracles and the incarnation. The best answers retained focus on the idea of the Christian God being just, with some excellent analysis, both in support and criticism of Boethius.

Weaker candidates tended to focus their evaluation on the question of whether God was eternal or everlasting and forgot to focus on the idea of justice. A number suggested that Boethius' views are incoherent without being unable to elaborate on or explain this incoherence.

3) 'The existence of evil cannot be justified if there is no life after death.' Discuss. [35]

The two-fold layering of this question provided very good differentiation. Many candidates struggled to form an argument in response to the question, and key philosophical issues such as continuity and identity were very rarely seen. Some candidates successfully used a contrast between resurrection and reincarnation, but of these only a few were sure exactly why they were doing this. Some responses also used the thinking of Kant, Augustine and Irenaeus, appropriately tied into the question. However, the majority of responses seen seemed to be answers of two halves –theodicies in one half and some thoughts on the afterlife in the other half. Plato was mentioned a great deal and many students struggled to relate this directly to the question, often through not fully understanding what Plato thought about the afterlife. This tended to produce a response that was more focused on the evidence for the existence of an afterlife and the form that this might take, rather than considering whether or not it can justify the existence of evil in the world.

While there was quite good knowledge of beliefs in reincarnation and heaven and hell, many failed to recognise that – as Hick has pointed out – the existence of hell as a place of eternal suffering is itself a part of the problem of evil. A few looked at the questions about God raised by instrumentalist approaches to evil, though some seemed to think that as long as bad people were consigned to everlasting damnation that was the end of the matter.

Many candidates answered the question solely from the point of view of the Problem of Evil without making the connection with life after death and some failed to understand the notion of justification.

Quite a few answers had implicit evaluation and tended to present a number of ideas without engaging in analysis of them. Most answers depended on assessing either theories of life after death or theodicies. However, those candidates who did attempt to evaluate tended to do it quite well and linked ideas directly to the question. A number of weaker responses seemed to have misunderstood the question and tried, instead, to argue whether or not evil would still exist if there were no afterlife, rather than considering the idea that evil could perhaps only be justified if there is life after death.

4) Critically assess Wiles' view of miracles. [35]

This question was very popular.

There was a tendency among some candidates to mention Wiles before asserting Hume's superiority and spending most of the time explaining Hume; these responses often lacked critical analysis, and remained in the safety of description. However, those who focused on the question produced some very good writing which effectively drew on a range of sources and evidence, well-manipulated to meet the demands of the question. There was some very good use of Biblical examples and this has been, generally, analysed and evaluated to answer the title of the question. Some students missed the point about creation being the only miracle performed by God and often incorrectly identified Wiles as a deist.

Some responses assumed Wiles was an atheist and too many did not sufficiently explore his ideas on the symbolic understanding of the great scriptural miracles. Few noted Wiles' appeal to Christ's own refusal to perform miracles on demand, or his argument from Origen, that the transformation of human lives is a greater work than physical miracles.

Many used Holland, possibly as they had learned what he proposed and wanted to use it, though most failed to use this material to address the question. The most disappointing answers were from those who knew a great deal about the topic of miracles but nothing about Wiles; but attempted to answer the question anyway. A significant number of candidates got into quite a muddle about what Wiles was saying; a few thinking Wiles believed God to be arbitrary and partisan and a few others believing him to be rejecting miracles and belief in God.

G582 Religious Ethics

General Comments

There were a many of satisfactory responses from candidates but perhaps not as many good or very good/excellent ones as in previous sessions. The most popular question was 2, followed by question 3. With regard to questions 1 and 4, many of these responses tended to be towards the weaker end of the spectrum. Centres are encouraged to assist students in focusing on being able to make connections between different parts of the specification eg Business Ethics and Virtue Ethics or to make connections within one part eg Gaia hypothesis and religious approaches to environmental issues.

Overall, it was pleasing to note that there seemed to be less of the “list approach” in responses whereby the views of each and every scholar were stated. However, candidates should be encouraged to do more than simply state views. ‘Engagement with the material’ is a key skill here as can be seen from the descriptors for Level 5 in AO1. It is important that candidates directly relate the views of different scholars to the question and analyse the material.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) To what extent are religious teachings on the environment and the Gaia hypothesis compatible? [35]

This was the least popular question. Whilst some candidates were able to demonstrate effective knowledge and understanding of the Gaia hypothesis, a number of candidates appeared to know little more than the name of James Lovelock and the concept of Gaia being self-regulating. This hampered their efforts to develop a sustained attempt at the question.

With regard to religious teachings on the environment, candidates appeared to be better informed. Most candidates focused on Christian teaching whilst a few focused on Islamic teaching. Some candidates were able to note key features of religious teaching namely the dominion and stewardship approaches. Others included reference to the suggested ecological holism apparent in the writing of St. Francis of Assisi or the implications of Rapture Theology and its perspective on the degradation of the environment.

Most candidates attempted to assess the extent to which the Gaia hypothesis and religious teachings could be seen as compatible. Such assessments varied widely. Some were able to question whether the notion of a Creator God could be included within the Gaia hypothesis or whether Gaia, as self-regulating, presented itself as essentially autonomous and independent. Some candidates were also able to question whether the notion of humankind being the apogee of God’s creation as in the first creation account in Genesis, could be compatible with the Gaia hypothesis, where humankind is seen mainly as an extraneous and insignificant part of Gaia. A number of candidates limited themselves to suggesting that stewardship provided the only link between religious teaching and the Gaia hypothesis.

However, there were some very good and excellent responses which had a clear understanding of the different approaches. These often brought together the work of Lovelock with religious elements, while also describing deep and shallow ecology and reflecting these ideas together through such thinkers as Naess and Sessions. It was pleasing to see candidates making specific reference to environmental incidents to enrich their responses.

2) 'Without freedom it is impossible to make moral choices.' Discuss. [35]

This was the most popular question. Some candidates were able to engage fully with the question by keeping their focus on the issue of making '*moral* choices'. They were then able to bring in considerable levels of knowledge and understanding regarding this issue and determinism, libertarianism and compatibilism.

Some candidates approached the question successfully by a consideration of what 'freedom' might mean and the different forms it might take. Some candidates showed an awareness of the way in which Locke could be approached from both a compatibilist and a determinist viewpoint. These candidates tended to refer to the locked room rather than go through the analogy in great depth and detail.

Some candidates limited themselves by focusing simply on whether any choices at all could be made 'without freedom'. Such responses tended to present a simple contrast between libertarianism and determinism, and then conclude by opting for compatibilism as the approach which stated that choices could be made despite having constrained freedom. It was encouraging to see a greater number of references to David Hume and Ted Honderich in candidates' responses. It was also notable that fewer candidates felt it necessary to provide a detailed account of the Leopold and Loeb Trial of 1924 and instead focus on the Darrow defence.

However, some candidates contented themselves by stating what they knew and understood, with little evidence of critical analysis or expression of a viewpoint. Some candidates were able to make creditable use of their knowledge and understanding with regard to the concept of the conscience, and how a fixed or deterministic approach in that area might impact on the notion of freedom or lack of freedom in making moral choices.

There were also some candidates who had obviously extended their reading and produced exceptional responses using a variety of thinkers from both within and beyond the specification.

3) Critically assess the view that the word 'good' has no real meaning. [35]

This was the second most popular question. Some candidates demonstrated a most impressive grasp of what the question required, with full and detailed knowledge and understanding of cognitivist and non-cognitivist approaches to the word 'good'. Such responses often benefitted by beginning with an outline of the problems of defining 'good' in the first place, with some using normative theories such as Utilitarianism and Virtue Ethics to explain the different approaches to the word 'good'. Some candidates were also able to evaluate how the phrase in the question, 'real meaning', might be interpreted.

Most candidates were able to assess the meaning, or lack of meaning, in the word 'good' using the approaches of Intuitionism and Emotivism. It was notable that more candidates seemed familiar with the approach of Naturalism and there were a number of successful references to F.H. Bradley as one of its exponents. Increasingly, candidates are assessing the work of Stevenson, Prichard and Ross to extend their responses. Some candidates also made reference to Rachels and Mackie in developing their arguments.

As in previous years, some candidates seemed less sure of what Prescriptivism entailed beyond its being a more developed form of Emotivism. Some candidates did limit themselves to a 'list approach' in their answers, but it was notable that a number showed 'engagement with the material' and were thus able to present a holistic assessment as required.

Some candidates were able to make creditable use of their knowledge and understanding of the religious language section of the Philosophy of Religion course. Such cross-referencing included useful discussion of the approaches that might be taken by Logical Positivism and Wittgenstein, and fulfilled the synoptic assessment well.

4) ‘Businesses are completely incompatible with Virtue Ethics.’ Discuss. [35]

This was the second least popular question. Some candidates were able to demonstrate a good level of knowledge and understanding by beginning with a definition of different kinds of ‘businesses’ – for example, a share holder model versus a stake holder model. Such responses included a high level of exemplification with reference to businesses such as the Cooperative, John Lewis, Primark, the Body Shop, or Ford.

Some candidates were able to demonstrate a good level of knowledge and understanding with regard to Virtue Ethics, including Aristotelian, Thomist and more modern approaches. However, some candidates were hampered by having a sound grasp of Business and a limited grasp of Virtue Ethics or a sound grasp of Virtue Ethics and a limited grasp of Business. In attempting to discuss the issues, some candidates were able to focus on the wording of the question as to Businesses and Virtue Ethics being ‘*completely* incompatible’ and then provide a thoughtful and nuanced conclusion. Here, the complex issue of profits needed for a successful business versus service to the customer and community was often raised.

Other candidates demonstrated a simplistic understanding of Virtue Ethics in concluding that, because it is individual moral agent/person-centred, it cannot be compatible with an organisation. Centres might be encouraged to note the communitarian background of Virtue Ethics as found in the well-ordered polis of Aristotle and in the approach taken by MacIntyre. Other candidates were able to develop their argument somewhat further by noting that a business can be viewed as a team of moral agents/persons with regard to whom Virtue Ethics might be entirely applicable.

Weaker candidates limited their answers to briefly agreeing that businesses are incompatible with Virtue Ethics and then for the main part listing other ethical theories such as Utilitarianism or Kantian Ethics which could be compatible with businesses.

G583 Jewish Scriptures

General Comments

There were some impressive responses from those candidates who had learnt quotations and who were able to make precise references to the set texts. Several candidates included good reference to scholarly opinion. Less successful responses frequently failed to demonstrate close study of the texts and were often dependent on class notes which they did not adapt to meet the demands of the question. A number of candidates would have improved their mark had they planned the answer in advance of writing down a response, and worked out what points were relevant.

Most essays were well expressed and there were few problems with legibility. There were no rubric errors and few candidates appeared to have time problems.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) To what extent is it true that the G-d of Amos and Hosea is vengeful, not loving? [35]

In general, candidates began by placing both prophets in their historical and social context. Some included useful discussion of the nature of prophecy. Most showed knowledge and understanding of how the economic prosperity of the age concealed social and moral disintegrations in the land, marked by extremes of wealth and poverty and superficial religion. Candidates tended to concentrate on selecting scriptural texts to illustrate doom-laden oracles, and the five visions of judgement in the book of Amos. In the best responses, candidates included a full account of Hosea's relationship with his wife Gomer and explained how the prophet used this to illustrate the broken relationship between Israel and G-d. In a handful of instances, candidates supposed that 'Amos was not a real prophet'.

In their evaluation, candidates frequently argued that there was a distinctive slant to each prophet's message dependent on their personal experience: Amos was the prophet of doom and gloom; Hosea, the prophet of love. Discussions about the 'extent to which' tended to revolve around the notions that Amos' main concern was social justice, while the principal theme in the book of Hosea was G-d's love for His people.

2) Critically assess the views as to when and why the book of Ruth was written. [35]

Most candidates showed good knowledge of the story of Ruth, and its setting in the time of the Judges. Some explained that tradition ascribes authorship to the prophet Samuel and often cited the Talmud in support. Many candidates explained that the story is one of the five megillot read on Shavuot because of its connection with the harvest. Most focused discussion on the apparent aims of the book, including: as protest against the exclusiveness of Ezra and Nehemiah; as promoting the attributes of love and compassion for others; as insistence on the duty of levirate marriage; as advancing the correct procedures for taking on Jewish identity; as recording the Moabite strain in David's ancestry.

In their evaluation, many candidates showed awareness that the dating of the book is related to views about its aims. Candidates who accepted that the book was written as protest against Ezra and Nehemiah's policy of racial purity advocated a relatively late date, not earlier than the Exile. Some cited Aramaisms in the text as indicative of a late date. Others argued the book's content to the time of the Judges.

3) 'The servant in Isaiah 40–43 has nothing in common with the figure described in Isaiah 53.' Discuss. [35]

Several candidates began by placing the book of Isaiah in its historical context. Some drew attention to the views of scholars who identify Isaiah 40-55 as the work of Deutero-Isaiah who prophesied in the 6th century BCE. When considering Isaiah 40-43, most candidates discussed the theme of Messianic hope, including: the fall of Babylon; the return of exiled Jews and the reconstruction of Jerusalem; the mission of the Jewish people. When considering Isaiah 53, most candidates focused discussion on the identification of the servant who suffers vicariously for his people, including: the servant is Isaiah, rebuked by his people for speaking out against them; the servant is an allegory for the Jewish people in exile; the servant is Jesus Christ who suffers for the sins of the people, and who through his suffering reconciles men and women to G-d.

In their evaluation, some candidates argued that if the figure described in Isaiah 53 is identified as the Jewish people in exile, then there is everything in common with the servant described in Isaiah 40-43. Some argued that it is perfectly feasible for the writer of Isaiah 40-43 and 53 to be talking about two different generations of Jews. Some argued that the servant in Isaiah 40-43 and the figure in Isaiah 53 do have something in common in that both texts discuss the 'chosen people.'

4) Critically examine the book of Micah's understanding of Messiahship. [35]

Most candidates began with a brief explanation of the historical context of the book of Micah. Several explained that Micah lived around the same time as Isaiah and commented on similarities in their messages. Discussion centred on the messianic material in the book, including: the prediction of universal peace; the nations coming in pilgrimage to Jerusalem to receive divine instruction; the destruction of Israel's enemies; the ingathering of exiles shepherded by a descendant of David from Bethlehem; the extermination of idols; the time of trial. Several candidates included useful discussion on the importance of social justice in the context of the messianic kingdom. Weaker responses often lacked detailed knowledge of the set text.

The best responses presented a coherent messianic portrayal from the book of Micah and supported their observations with secure references and quotations. Some discussed the significance of both a messianic era and a messianic figure. Some discussed the importance of individuals taking responsibility to meet G-d's requirements in their own lives in preparation for the Messiah.

G584 New Testament

General Comments

Very few candidates failed to answer a question. The overall level of responses was good. Candidates showed a good understanding of the specification and made good use of the technical terminology and a range of scholarly views. Pleasingly, there were very few weak scripts and it was good to see candidates tackle the question set rather than the general topic. Many candidates included references to contemporary scholarship but equally many misattributed views; at times it would seem a name was plucked at random and an erroneous view assigned. Lengthy introductions on the general topic (eg Hume's view on Miracles in Q 3) added little to the substance of a number of essays.

The quality of written communication was very good with few errors in spelling punctuation or grammar.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) Discuss the issues concerning the authorship and purpose of Matthew's Gospel. [35]

Not all answers referred to both authorship and purpose but most managed to say something about both. Many candidates questioned whether anyone knew the author of Matthew and assessed evidence for him being a disciple. Many rooted Matthew's purpose in post-70 Judaism and established Matthew as writing to defend his Jewish Christian identity in response to resurgent Pharisees post Jamnia. Better responses were able to link this background to key texts, and provided useful examples of Matthew's pro and anti Judaism. For some candidates it turned into a 'trot' through Matthew's theology but many identified other aims and purposes such as addressing the delay of the Parousia. Some candidates chose to take one issue, discuss it, and then move on to another. Whilst this is answering the question appropriately, it can make it more difficult for candidates to gain the highest marks, as the approach does not often lend itself to producing arguments that are holistic.

2) 'Jesus' teachings on who belongs to the Kingdom of God were completely different from the Judaism of his time.' Discuss. [35]

In general, this question was not well answered. However, only a few candidates fell into the trap of writing a standard Kingdom of God essay. Candidates identified Jesus' re-drawing of the boundaries of salvation and looked at the rich and poor, sinful, possessed, gentiles etc. There were many vague and inaccurate assertions about first century Jewish belief; for instance, although there is substantial biblical evidence to support an eschatological inclusion of the gentiles, many assumed that Jesus was unique in offering the Kingdom to gentiles. Some candidates looked at the variety of views within Judaism and were able to pinpoint where Jesus would have been in conflict with the Pharisees, but not necessarily other branches of Judaism. Too few gave specific biblical beliefs to support their discussion of Jewish beliefs.

3) Critically examine how Mark used the miracles to show his audience that Jesus was the Messiah. [35]

Many candidates described the Miracles, often at length, and commented on whether they showed Jesus to be the Messiah or not. Better candidates tended to identify Jewish Messianic expectations and then used these to assess whether the Miracles show Jesus to be the Messiah; for instance, Jesus as a warrior could be seen in the exorcisms battling Satan; the host of the Messianic banquet could be seen in the feeding of the 5000. A number quite rightly challenged the assumption of the question and used their knowledge of other first century wonder workers, such as Honi and Hanina, to dispute the Miracles' Messianic message.

Some candidates erroneously assumed that Son of Man, Son of God and Prophet were all Messianic titles; this is not the case.

There was good use of scholarly work by many candidates in response to this question.

4) Critically compare the parables on judgement in Matthew 25 with the parables on forgiveness in Luke 15–16. [35]

Most candidates made simple comparisons between Matthew 25 and Luke 15. A number wrote out the parables at length, which was not a requirement of the question and not necessary. Most identified that Matthew was about judgement and Luke about inclusion and forgiveness; better candidates tried to explain the different reasons and settings that may have led to this. Candidates who ignored Luke 16 missed significant creditable material (and many did) – the parables of the Dishonest Steward and the Rich Man and Lazarus – but those who identified them were able to argue that Matthew and Luke’s views are not as polarised as they first appear. Some candidates questioned why Luke had included these and assessed how they related to the forgiveness parables.

G585 Developments in Christian Theology

General Comments

All questions were attempted; questions 1 and 3 were more popular than the alternatives. Many candidates appeared to find Section 1 more challenging than Section 2 and there were a greater number of poor responses in this section. Even so, there were many excellent responses and it was clear that many candidates had read some of the prescribed philosophers and theologians and were able to give detailed, sophisticated and original answers. There were, however, too many cases where candidates appeared to know the material but wrote in such an opaque and muddled way that it was often very difficult to know what they were trying to say.

Although the point has been made many times, it really is the case that less can be more. Those who planned their answers generally gained higher marks. There were also a larger number of candidates than usual who did not use their time well and wrote too much for one essay and too little for the other. It is also worth bearing in mind that a good essay conclusion can sometimes make a considerable difference to the mark awarded, especially when assessing AO2.

In some cases there were some basic misunderstandings of topics. It might help some candidates and centres to read the notes for teachers which can be found on the OCR website.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) 'Post-modernism does not contradict Christian exclusivism.' Discuss. [35]

The comment has frequently been made that there is still a general misunderstanding about what modernism and postmodernism mean. The examiners took a fairly broad view of what postmodernism entails and those who took it to mean a suspicion of objective reality, an emphasis on subjectivism, rejection of meta-narratives and world views usually had enough knowledge to make a reasonable attempt at this question. 'Being nice' or tolerant of religion did not give candidates enough critical knowledge to develop an argument. Examiners were also broad in their own tolerance of who is and who is not a postmodern thinker. Many argued that Feuerbach and Ninian Smart are examples of postmodern thinking; the case for Feuerbach (simply from a historical perspective) is less convincing, although Smart's phenomenological approach assumes a subject-object relationship which is not shared by many postmodernist thinkers. Those who began by sketching out Don Cupitt's solar ethics were able to pin down some of the characteristics of the postmodern mind set and use this to good effect when considering Christian exclusivism.

Most chose Karl Barth as their example of an exclusivist, although some referred to *Dominus Iesus*, Calvinism and Kraemer. There were some excellent discussions of Barth's own suspicion of religion and his notion that revelation (as the Word) is a counter-cultural challenge of human reason and objectivity. Some sophisticated essays considered what is meant by (religious) truth and whether postmodernism permits mini-narrative truths rather than Truth. Some concluded that an exclusivist is more authentic in his or her Christian truth claim, as the 'perspectivism' of postmodernism cannot categorically deny that some people will claim to know the Truth.

The majority of candidates concluded that exclusivism and postmodernism are incompatible.

2) Evaluate Karl Rahner's teaching on the relationship between history and non-Christian religions. [35]

There were a number of general answers which gave an overview of inclusivism. Better candidates recognised that the question's focus was on history and rightly latched on to the issue of salvation before Christ and the significance of the historical place of the incarnation/resurrection. Many were aware of Rahner's four theses but less able to recognise that these are, in effect, what is meant by the 'historical'. Some candidates were able to refer to the place of Israel's history, the role of the prophets in Christian pre-history and as examples of the Ab Abel argument. From this, many candidates developed Rahner's argument of the good will, openness, the desire for grace and his re-working of the *votum ecclesiae*. Many suggested that his neo-Thomist naturalism could be linked with his broad understanding of the historical, especially with his use of Kant and the universal good will. Many discussed Acts 17 (St. Paul's address to the Athenians) and were able to use this to illustrate some of Rahner's key ideas – as he himself does with this passage.

Some particularly fine essays developed Rahner's mystical/existential outlook in this context by considering his use of Heidegger. Candidates discussed Heidegger's idea of finite/infinite experience and reflected on Rahner's claim that this indicates a universal human desire for salvation. Many candidates made the crucial point whether this aspect of Rahner's theology is in fact really Christian as he appears to have relegated explicit faith in the Church and Christ to the implicit. Some excellent discussion considered whether it was better to remain an anonymous Christian than someone who, having experienced the visible Church, then rejects it.

Other candidates took the more usual route of comparing Rahner to Hick and/or Barth. There were some good answers here, especially those who understood Barth's primacy of revelation (and mistrust of natural theology) and Hick's emphasis on experience (but not grace).

3) To what extent does a hermeneutic of suspicion enable feminist theologians to reassess the place of women in Christianity? [35]

There were a surprisingly high number of candidates who were unsure exactly what was meant by the hermeneutic of suspicion given that it is an important topic in the AS course (Liberation Theology); some just took it to mean biblical interpretation in general. The best candidates understood that there are various hermeneutics of suspicion depending whether one is coming from a Marxist, existential or Freudian perspective. For example, many discussed how de Beauvoir's suspicion of the eternal feminine and gender essentialism has been used by feminist theologians to critique Christianity ideas of femininity and motherhood.

Most candidates linked the hermeneutic of suspicion with second wave reconstructionist theologians and in particular with Fiorenza and Ruether. Good answers understood that Fiorenza's *historical* reconstruction suggests that the very early phase of Christianity was radically egalitarian and subsequently 'buried' (albeit imperfectly) these traditions in favour of the prevailing status quo. Many at this point discussed Pagel's analysis of the Gnostic Church. There were some successful analyses of key passages and a number focused in on the lost voice of women in the Gnostic gospels.

There was some good discussion of Ruether (note the common misspelling: it should be Ruether *not* Reuther) and her argument for the Sophia (not sofia) Wisdom tradition and its impact on early New Testament Christology. Some used this moment to consider the Trinity and how it has been remodelled by feminist theologians, by removing its patriarchal bias and developing it as a model of community relationships (Janet Soskice was often mentioned in this discussion as well as Julian of Norwich).

Many candidates also discussed Cady Stanton and Tribble (very few however remembered how Tribble presented the rape of Tamar as the rape of Wisdom).

There were some excellent critiques. Some argued that there is no need for a hermeneutic of suspicion because women are already presented in a favourable light (the line taken in *Mulieris Dignitatem*). Others applied the radical suspicions of Hampson and Daly to illustrate that when applied thoroughly, the Christianity which is actually revealed is thoroughly sexist, spiritually and ethically.

The report last year drew attention to a widespread misunderstanding of Hampson's 'golden thread' argument. Hampson's use of the term is ironic and critical of Christianity as she contends that there is an overwhelmingly stronger patriarchal thread.

4) 'Mary Daly's feminist theology was inspiring but wrong.' Discuss. [35]

Most candidates had a sound understanding of Daly's thought and her radical approach to feminism in general theology in particular. Good candidates were able to discuss in detail Daly's debt to Nietzsche's idea of transvaluation. There were some good answers which understood her desire to 'castrate' the divine and in particular to reveal the Apollonian nature of Christianity. Many quoted her famous, 'If God is male, then male is God' but it should be noted that this is not the same as, 'If male is God, then God is male'; many used this aphorism to investigate her imaginative use of language and focused on her unholy Trinity (rape, genocide and murder) and her suspicion of liberal androgyny. The best answers understood how her project was to pick and continue where Nietzsche had left off (or indeed failed) and that this was not only inspirational but valuable.

In general, weaker candidates needed to have a better detailed knowledge of what Daly actually argued, rather than anecdotes about her life and her rejection of (Catholic) Christianity.

The usual critique was that Daly had 'freak show' value but was too extreme and hypocritical (as she appeared to promote an inverted sexism). Others could see the value of her extreme views as important in challenging patriarchy and mind-body dualism. A number argued that Daly's views were illegitimate since they were drawn from Nietzsche – a man!

G586 Buddhism

General Comments

Very few candidates failed to answer a question. There was no one question which was more popular than the others. The overall level of responses was good.

Candidates showed a good understanding of the specification and made good use of the technical terminology and a range of scholarly views. Most obvious were ideas from Harvey, Gethin and Cush. A few mentioned Williams and Gombrich.

The quality of written communication was very good with few errors in spelling punctuation or grammar. Candidates' responses were, on the whole, well structured.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) Assess the view that it is impossible to describe nibbana effectively. [35]

This question was generally answered well. Most candidates could discuss the issues surrounding any attempt to describe nibbana. Candidates made good use of ideas such as the *via negativa* to show what nirvana is not; and then criticised this by suggesting that this appears nihilistic (although it is not), and more positive descriptions are preferred, or no description at all is even better. Some candidates suggested that the idea of the Pure Land (western paradise) is the closest a Buddhist could get to understanding nibbana. Some very good candidates described it effectively, and discussed what this concept might mean.

There was good use of the questions of King Milinda but there was little use of any of scriptural descriptions of nibbana, for example: The Udana 8.1 to show the *via negativa* 'There is that dimension, monks, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; ... neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon.'; and the Ituvuttaka 43 which states: 'The escape from that is calm, permanent, beyond inference, unborn, unproduced, the sorrowless, stainless state, the cessation of stressful qualities, the stilling of fabrications, bliss.'

2) To what extent is upaya the most important concept in the Lotus Sutra? [35]

This was a popular question. Better candidates discussed whether or not upaya was the most important and made good use of other concepts such as ekayana, tathagtagarbha, and the Bodhisattva path well in this discussion. Most made good use of the parables (including wise physician and the phantom city) to support their discussion. Good answers explained how the parables can be read in different ways and even if they concluded that all illustrated upaya, a few suggested that this was not necessarily conclusive. Too few candidates went much beyond the parable of the burning house, and even then some were confused about how it should be interpreted from within the Mahayanan tradition. Weaker candidates spent too long retelling the parables themselves and left little time to discuss them. Some tried evaluating by comparing the sutra to the Heart Sutra but without much success.

3) 'The five precepts are of no help when making ethical decisions.' Discuss. [35]

Many candidates answered this question using ideas from Question 2 (ie upaya) and this made for an interesting discussion of the relative nature of the five precepts. Some suggested that as rules, the pansils were either too rigid or too general to govern behaviour. Some compared the five precepts to other lists of rules/guidelines (for instance, the Eightfold Fold Path) or to virtues or character traits such as the Ten Perfections. Some took a more ethical approach, looking at how the five precepts could be applied in a modern context, and then examining whether or not

this meant that they were of any help. This led to some very insightful discussion and conclusions. Weaker candidates tended to address the question in a general way, and talked about the five precepts as a whole rather than applying them to specific ethical issues. Very few of these candidates seemed to know about specific Buddhist teaching on abortion, euthanasia, war etc. Those who were aware about the ambiguity of vegetarianism in the different Buddhist traditions, for example, were able to develop good answers.

4) 'Buddhism in the West is not a betrayal of Buddhist origins.' Discuss. [35]

Interestingly, candidates responded to this question in many different ways. Most showed how some western Buddhist organisations have adapted Buddhism to suit a western context such as Triratna (formerly the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order). This often involved questioning the validity of sangharakshita as a Buddhist teacher. Some followed this by asking similar questions about Stephen Batchelor who has developed a secular form of Buddhism. Candidates often contrasted these ideas with the Thai forest tradition in the west which has limited practices of its origins to the observing of Uposatha days. Other candidates chose to look at the idea of betrayal of origins and discussed the idea that as the Pali canon is the oldest written record of Buddhism, (or the Buddha's teachings) then everything that is not from the Theravada tradition is also a betrayal. This was argued very well by some, especially when they made reference to Zen and Pure Land Buddhism.

Weaker responses lacked specific knowledge and examples of how Buddhism has actually developed in the west.

G587 Hinduism

General Comments

All questions were attempted although question 4 was noticeably more popular than the others on the question paper.

A lot of responses contained irrelevant, generic or repeated material – the candidates appeared to be writing everything they knew, rather than selecting and applying according to the question.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) Assess the importance of jnana in the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara. [35]

A generally well answered question from both an AO1 and an AO2 perspective. Candidates were familiar with both Advaita and the life and religious practices of Sankara. Most candidates also utilised their knowledge of Vishistadvaita as an aspect of their analysis and were clearly aware of the differences between them. The best responses were able to relate jnana to the possibility of becoming jivan mukti within the current lifetime, while remaining aware that this is not a requirement for which everyone will strive. It was also pleasing to see that a number of candidates were able to distinguish between Advaita considered as a philosophy and as a religious approach to life.

2) To what extent is karma the most important teaching in the Bhagavad Gita? [35]

A popular question because candidates were familiar with the story of the Bhagavad Gita. However, this did lead to weaker candidates retelling the story, which was unnecessary. Most candidates were aware that all four of the margas are considered in the Gita, and were able to give a general account of what each of these is. Some candidates were further aware of how each was specifically related to Arjuna by Krishna. However, it was disappointing to see how few candidates were aware of different forms of karma. The relationship between dharma and karma was also overlooked by all but a few candidates.

Analysis tended to be simplistic – claiming that since karma arises from everything and affects rebirth, it is by default the most important. While this is a valid argument few candidates were able to take it further, and several went on to suggest simply that good karma will result ultimately in moksha which is not the teaching of the Gita (again the distinction between nishkama and sakama karma was really necessary for meaningful analysis).

3) 'The four purusharthas are of no help when making ethical decisions.' Discuss. [35]

Candidates were aware of the four purusharthas and were able to name and give a brief account of their meaning. Most candidates chose to place them in the context of varnashramadharma, which was appropriate, although it tended to result in a long-winded description of the system.

However, when it came to relating the purusharthas to ethical decision making candidates seemed to struggle. A number seemed to misunderstand the nature of the concept of purusharthas as aims of life (hence the ashramas connection) and attempted to analyse them as something analogous to Christian virtues or religious commandments. It was disappointing how few candidates made explicit the importance of dharma as a guiding principle for following the other purusharthas.

On the positive side, most candidates were able to address the ethical issues component of the question with reasonable effectiveness. The best answers did this by considering specific ethical dilemmas in relation to the previously identified concepts, and this approach was less inhibited by regarding the purusharthas as instructions rather than principles.

4) 'Hinduism in the West is not a betrayal of Hindu origins.' Discuss. [35]

This seemed to be the most popular question, and it was in general well answered. A wide range of interpretations were applied. Some candidates considering the Indus Valley Culture as Hindu origins; others dealt with modern India and the ways in which Hinduism is practiced there, as opposed to the West; a few took a philosophical stance and argued that Hinduism has no origins which can be clearly identified. All approaches were considered valid and this was reflected in the final mark scheme.

In general the AO2 and synoptic elements of the question were dealt with more strongly in this question than others. Candidates at all levels were able to consider issues such as the application of the varnashramdharma system, or traditions such as caste and arranged marriage outside of India.

Most candidates considered ISKCON as the clearest example of Hinduism outside India, some also considered the practice of individuals such as Gandhi or dealt generally with Hindu communities in the UK. A few candidates dealt with the Arya and Brahma Samaj movements, but these movements are more focused on India than the West and, in general, candidates did not make them relevant to the question asked.

G588 Islam

General Comments

Overall the general standard of responses was similar to previous years with a large proportion of candidates achieving within levels 3 or 4. Most candidates appeared to have sound to good knowledge of the topics but their evaluative skills were, for the most part, less developed.

Questions 3 and 4 appeared to be the most popular choices with significantly fewer candidates attempting question 2.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) To what extent do the contents of Surah 4 reflect the changes which Muhammad ﷺ introduced with Islam? [35]

The majority of candidates clearly had a good knowledge of the contents of Surah 4 and this was demonstrated in their responses. The weaker candidates were generally those who focused primarily on the changes brought about to the position of women – ignoring the other changes implemented. The better responses, therefore, were those which demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the variety of changes implemented, such as the treatment of orphans, inheritance rights and relations with non-Muslims.

In general, the evaluative element of this question was not dealt with as critically as is expected at this level. A significant number of responses did not take into account the changes Muhammad ﷺ introduced with Islam that are not included in this surah. As a result of this, candidates were unable to evaluate fully the extent to which Surah 4 reflects the changes introduced. There were, however, some candidates who demonstrated excellent evaluative skills. They not only discussed changes introduced by Muhammad ﷺ not included in the Surah, but also discussed the extent to which the changes are fully upheld in the teachings of Surah 4.

2) Critically assess how far Muslim teachings on work and wealth benefit the Ummah more than the individual Muslim. [35]

This appeared to be the least popular question, and although the general standard was satisfactory, there were some excellent attempts. A large proportion of candidates focused mainly on zakat/sadaqah and seemed to have little other knowledge of Islamic teachings on wealth and work. However, the best candidates were able to offer a whole variety of teachings on both topics. These included the Islamic teaching on riba, Qur'anic guidance on the issue of women working, inheritance laws and types of work that may be regarded as haram.

There were quite a few candidates who sought to demonstrate how Muslim teachings on work and wealth benefit both the individual and the Ummah and in doing so, failed to assess critically as the question demanded. The better candidates were those who were able to illustrate an in-depth appreciation of the numerous ways in which the teachings can benefit either the Ummah or the individual whilst also understanding the connection between the two.

3) Discuss the extent to which it is true that Sufis must abstain from all pleasures. [35]

This was a very popular question, however, the quality of responses was variable. All of the candidates were able to explain the general philosophy behind Sufism, to some extent. The weaker responses, however, did this at quite a basic level and demonstrated little in-depth understanding of the approach. The better responses were those which showed a

comprehensive knowledge of Sufism including the overall philosophy and goal of Sufism along with the various ways of attaining union with Allah. Such candidates clearly had an appreciation of the roots of the movement and the extent to which pleasures are denied and were able to incorporate this into their evaluation.

There were some very good evaluations of this question. The best responses picked up on the subjective nature of pleasure and used this to help evaluate some of the Sufi practices which are used. Candidates discussed the idea that as much pleasure can be gained from spiritual pursuits as from material things. The weaker candidates were unable to do this and several just offered a one sided discussion.

4) ‘Sunni and Shi’a Islam share the same views concerning the importance of each of the articles of Islamic belief.’ Discuss. [35]

This was another popular question with a range of levels being gained by the candidates. Nearly all candidates knew the historical reasons for the Sunni/Shi’a split and discussed this on some level in their answers. The stronger candidates were able to appreciate that this aspect was of less relevance to the question and so kept the material used to a minimum. The weaker candidates were those who provided a long narrative of the split. There were also a few candidates who discussed the Five Pillars rather than the Articles of Belief and were generally unable to achieve higher than a level 2 as a result of this. There were some excellent responses which demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the Articles and the different approaches to them, from both the Sunni and Shi’a perspective.

There were a significant number of candidates who evaluated the differences in how Sunni and Shi’a Muslims view the Articles, rather than the extent to which they share the same views concerning the importance of them. The better candidates tended to focus mainly on Shi’a beliefs about the Imam and the nature of the Qur’an as an argument for them not sharing the same views concerning the importance of the Articles of Belief. Obvious arguments to say there is little difference between the two views tended to centre around the belief in Tawhid and the fact that ultimately they are all Muslims and, therefore, should view the Articles with the same importance.

G589 Judaism

General Comments

The examiners were pleased to see very good responses from those candidates who had prepared themselves well for the examination. Characteristic of such responses was the candidate's ability to shape material known and understood to the precise requirements of the question. Less successful candidates tended to rely on class notes that had been memorised by heart, and did not demonstrate evidence of clear thinking during the examination. A number of candidates would have improved the mark had they planned their response, and worked out what points were of relevance before writing down the answer.

The question paper proved successful in allowing candidates to respond at their own level and there were no common misinterpretations of the rubric. The quality of written communication was generally good and there did not appear to be difficulties over time allocation.

Comments on Individual Questions

1) 'Reform Judaism has done more damage than good.' Discuss. [35]

Most candidates explained the European Enlightenment as the primary reason for the emergence of Reform, and many included good discussion of the aims of the early influential reformers; notably, Moses Mendelssohn. In the main, discussion centred on the beliefs and practices of the emerging movement and how its doctrines challenged the Orthodox faith. Several candidates erroneously supposed that Reform Jews do not believe that the Torah is divinely inspired. Some candidates included discussion of modern day controversy, including the admission of non-Orthodox students to Orthodox schools.

In their evaluation, many candidates argued that Reform's rejection of Torah as the final authority has irrevocably divided Judaism. Some argued that Reform Jews live very secular lives and are too accommodating of the spirit of the age. Others argued that Reform has made Judaism more accessible in the modern world, especially for less observant Jews. Some pointed to Reform's emphasis on the prophetic nature of Judaism.

2) To what extent are the teachings about Messianic hope reflected in Jewish life today? [35]

Many candidates focused discussion on traditional beliefs concerning the Messianic hope before considering Reform's naturalistic interpretation. Some discussed the modern Religious Zionist attitude, including the belief that the return of exiles to Israel is paving the way for the future appearance of the Messiah. Several made excellent reference to Maimonides' interpretation of the Biblical teachings. In a handful of instances, candidates erroneously supposed that Orthodoxy rejects the doctrine of a personal Messiah. Some explained the practice of symbolising the expectation of the Messiah at brit milah ceremonies and at Passover. Some discussed modern Messianic hope within Lubavitch Hasidism.

In their evaluation, many candidates maintained that Messianic hope is more important for Jews today and argued the missionary campaigns within Lubavitch Hasidism, all aimed at hastening the Messiah's arrival by bringing Jews to Torah obedience. Some pointed to the large number of Jews who have emigrated to Israel in the belief that the foundation of the state marked the beginning of the Messianic redemption. Some emphasised how belief in the Messianic hope sustained the Jewish people through the Holocaust. Others maintained that Messianic hope does not remain the same for Jews today: many have abandoned the faith post-Holocaust, and significant numbers have married out. Some argued that, for Progressive Jews, the notion of a personal Messiah having dominion over humanity does not resonate with the modern democratic spirit.

3) Critically assess the relationship between the religious idea of the Land of Israel and the present day State of Israel. [35]

Most candidates began with explanation of the Biblical understanding of the Land of Israel as the land promised by G-d to Abraham and his descendants. Several discussed the scriptural concept of the Land of Israel as a theocracy, and the requirement that Jews obey the mitzvot. Some discussed the influences of the Second Aliyah dominated by socialist Jews from Russia. There was much good discussion of the basic institutions and life of the modern state and whether the state affirms Jewish faith and culture. Weaker responses tended to address the question solely in terms of Zionism. Some supposed that religious Zionists are opposed to the present day State of Israel.

In their evaluation, most candidates argued that the institutions and national life of the present day State of Israel do not match the religious ideal. Although Israelis can practise their faith, Israel is a democracy rather than a theocracy. Some argued that while the present day state has been established upon the Jewish ancestral soil, it is a political entity brought into being by the United Nations as a response to the Holocaust. Some argued the views of religious anti-Zionists who maintain that a homeland for Jews should only be established upon the Messiah's arrival, at which point State and Land will be one.

4) 'Judaism has learnt little from the experience of the twentieth-century Holocaust.' Discuss. [35]

The majority of candidates began by outlining the historical context to the Holocaust; several included discussion of previous persecutions in Jewish history. Much discussion centred around Jewish safety and security post-Holocaust, and whether the traditional understanding of G-d can be retained. Several discussed conflicts within Judaism between Jews of differing philosophies. Some discussed Jewish support for minority groups and those who are oppressed. Weaker responses tended to address the question solely in terms of post-Holocaust theology without direction to the question.

Nearly all candidates agreed that Jews have learnt much from the experience of the Holocaust, including: the need to protect themselves, the realisation that G-d will not always save them, the moral imperative to side with those who are oppressed. Arguments that Jews have not learnt much from the experience of the Holocaust included: the continuing isolation of ultra-Orthodox groups, Jews living in Israel who do not identify themselves as they ought with the sufferings of the Palestinian people, Jews who have not responded to the Holocaust by re-affirming their Jewish identity and who have moved further away from faith and culture.

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