



**General Certificate of Education**

**Religious Studies (2060)**

**Unit 4 Religion and Human Experience**

**Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - June series*

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## General Comments

It was encouraging to see a considerable increase in the number of students taking Unit 4, compared to the legacy synoptic paper, RS12.

Examiners found the demands of the three units to be comparable, if not identical. RST4A was the most popular with just over half the total candidates sitting this paper, RST4C then following with just over a third of the students tackling this paper, RST4B had the smallest entry. Each paper has been given its own report written by the senior examiner with specific responsibility for that paper.

However, there are some general points applicable to all three units. Firstly the fact that the second part of a question now has a single AO2 focus has allowed many candidates to perform better on the AO2 element of questions, and this has been very encouraging. The majority of candidates were able to answer both parts of the question they chose in sufficient depth. Secondly, it is important for students to note that answering more than one question will never help them achieve more marks, the papers are designed for candidates to spend all their time answering one chosen question and marks can only be awarded accordingly. Thirdly legibility is important – examiners should be able to read scripts so that they are able to follow the reasoning and arguments of a candidate. Finally, as ever, candidates who do not read the question carefully, and thus do not answer the question set, will not be able to perform to their potential.

Overall, the examiners were pleased with the standard of answers and recognised that there were some very impressive scripts from candidates who were knowledgeable, able to write in an articulate manner and, most importantly, who sought to engage fully with the questions.

### RST4A

#### Section A Life, Death and Beyond

##### Question 1

##### Part 01

There were some excellent scripts where candidates dealt with a thorough examination of both the religious and the secular. In the case of the former, many tackled the question by considering specific religions, the most popular being Christianity and Buddhism. In the case of Christianity, candidates tended to refer to scripture references in particular Genesis where, for example, they examined the implications of the texts which refer to human nature being in the image of God. A number also developed their consideration beyond the text, such as looking at the issue of sin and then the different theologies surrounding original sin. When candidates turned to Buddhism they often considered the Buddhist view of human nature as being unable to recognise the human states of suffering and the need for people to recognise what Buddhists regard as true human nature. Some candidates also went on to look at ideas about human nature and the possible survival of some form of existence after death.

When turning to the secular there were some excellent examinations of the humanist approach, but also the ideas which people who accept evolution would adopt with regard to human nature, often referring to writers like Richard Dawkins and Charles Darwin. Many also then considered that this approach was very likely to mean that people would not accept any idea about any element of a human being surviving death.

Weaker answers tended to make a series of statements which, although often accurate, were unsubstantiated, with no reference to supporting material. There were also problems with accuracy, for example where some referred to Calvin and predestination as a feature of human nature, they failed to understand the doctrine of predestination, Calvin does not conclude that this means people can 'behave how they like as it does not matter'.

## **Part 02**

There were some strong answers which sought to say that it was the degree to which people today regard ideas about human nature irrelevant rather than seeking to establish a simple yes or no approach, which generally represents reality. Thus they said that for religious people the religious teaching remained significant although certain teachings had less significance than in the past, for example death is less apparent to most people and thus ideas about the immortality of the soul are not so important for people as they live out their daily life. The best answers went on to consider the impact of ideas from a secular point of view, thus they demonstrated that the secular still have clear ideas. Some of these may be negative, that is rejecting religious concepts, but nevertheless remained very relevant since, for example, a rejection of immortality would mean that people would want to get the most out of their life on earth. However, for many humanists, this would not necessarily mean that they would live a selfish life.

Weak responses tended, again, to revert to broad generalisations which often meant that they were inaccurate, for example, claiming that secular people have no ideas or concerns about human nature because they all live selfishly for the day.

## **Question 2**

### **Part 03**

Whilst it was possible to answer this question by referring to religious beliefs in an almost generic way, most candidates chose to look at specific religions. As with many of the responses on this paper to questions requiring references to specific religions, candidates tended to refer to Christianity and Islam along with Buddhism and Hinduism. Of course, other religions were mentioned which was entirely acceptable. However, it is important that where candidates refer to a variety of religions their references are accurate. In the case of most religions it is very difficult to claim that all followers have the same ideas, thus it is important that candidates refer to specific groups where appropriate or at least acknowledge that only 'some followers'. Not all Christians accept ideas of purgatory. Not all Jews accept the idea of an immediate judgement after death. In Buddhism the Tibetan Book of the Dead is not accepted by all.

Many of the best answers looked at some elements of religious teaching about the nature of human beings as they then suggested that this demonstrated the importance of present life. They then went on to look at teachings about life after death as they were able to demonstrate how teachings like judgement or Karma clearly had a very direct effect upon the way people lived their lives. Thus they showed how religious people would follow specific teachings, for example, for Buddhists the need to recognise the four aspects of suffering and the role of the Eightfold Path.

Weaker responses were often too general in their approach to both life on earth and life after death and failed to read the question properly, by ignoring the 'importance' element and thus just writing about religious teaching concerned with life on earth. Some in an attempt to provide support for their claims then spent far too much time on the supporting material, for example

talking about the value of human life. They went into detailed teaching about abortion/euthanasia. Whilst there can be some relevance to the question, it is not about the value of human life it is about the importance, and although value is an aspect of such an examination it cannot be the entire focus.

#### **Part 04**

There were some very impressive responses to the question where candidates took issue with aspects of the question. This was a perfectly acceptable approach. Is society largely secular? Probably not, as there are still many religious people in almost any modern society. Are these beliefs unacceptable? Surely not, they may be rejected by some people, but in most societies people are free to believe what they like. The best also considered that whilst there were many positive approaches towards beliefs about life beyond death, even the negative is a belief! There were some good debates about the strengths and weaknesses of ideas about life beyond death, sometimes drawing from philosophical approaches.

Weaker responses adopted a simplistic approach claiming that religion was dying out and that most of its claims could be proved to be wrong and therefore ideas were unacceptable because they were inaccurate.

### **Section B Perceptions of Ultimate Reality**

#### **Question 3**

##### **Part 05**

This was a less popular question. The best answers did look at the two separate elements of the question; definitions and ideas. They also saw that the question was asking them to refer to 'religion(s) you have studied'. Weaker responses ignored this completely and sometimes attempted to answer the question in broad terms rarely referring to specific religions. Most understood the difference between God and Ultimate Reality, and the best looked at the latter as an interesting and different approach. Examination from the strong responses meant that they considered the implications of some of both the definitions and the ideas, thus in a Christian context they looked at the definition of God as omniscient and then what this might mean, for example set against the idea of human free will. Or they took the idea of Jesus being God in human form and considered how this might operate. Weaker responses tended to try and answer the question by providing a series of simple statements, often relying upon definitions.

##### **Part 06**

Some candidates attempted to answer this purely in the negative, claiming that religious ideas about God are all wrong and thus they do not help people to understand anything about 'why life is as it is'. Whilst it is entirely possible to adopt the approach, it cannot be claimed that this does not help people to understand 'why life is as it is', indeed as the best answers were able to demonstrate the reverse. For the non-believer rejection does allow them to understand, for example, that life is what humans make of it. There were some very good responses which developed the 'consider how far' element of the questions showing that some religious definitions have been changed and adapted as people's view of 'life as it is' have changed, thus there were some interesting considerations of Process Theology. Those who considered Buddhism presented some excellent points about the need for people to gain a 'true' understanding of life as it is.

## **Question 4**

### **Part 07**

The question is clearly set in the positive not the negative. It asks for examination of religious language as a meaningful way of talking about God/Ultimate Reality. Thus candidates who immediately sought to adopt the negative by referring at length to the Vienna Circle, to Verification and Falsification struggled to answer the question since they were often left with stating that religious language has no meaning. The strong answers approached the question by looking at the many different ideas there are which attempt to show how religious language can be meaningful from Wittengenstien to Tillich, along with analogy, as just a few approaches adopted. Some also developed their answer to spend a little time looking at definitions of God and considering whether these would mean that certain aspects of religious language would struggle with meaning, whilst others also focused upon faith as a way of realising meaning.

### **Part 08**

This required that candidates did look at claims about the nature of God, which indeed means drawing upon some of the definitions and ideas religions have about God/Ultimate Reality. Provided that candidates then related this to those scholars/ideas which suggest religious language does not have any meaning then this worked. It was the weaker answer which failed to take the 'nature of God/Ultimate Reality' and relate this to the problems there are with religious language. Rather they simply provided an outline of the problems with religious language. Whilst this gained some credit, it was not addressing the question fully. The best answers considered how different ideas about God could lead to religious language having meaning, thus some claimed that as Jesus was God in human form clearly what has been recorded about him and what he said is a perfect example of religious language having meaning, although the very best answers acknowledged that this was still dependent upon faith and belief.

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## Section C Religious Experience

### Question 5

#### Part 09

This proved to be a popular question and those candidates who had clearly prepared these two aspects of religious experience were able to do extremely well. The best answers recognised that there were two aspects to be considered with both conversion and mysticism, that is characteristics and processes. The best answers were able to refer to a variety of scholars to support their answers, from James to Rambo and Farhadian, from Theresa of Avila to Starbuck and Swinburne. It was encouraging to see how well the best answers understood what the various scholars had to say. Equally they were able to further support their answers with examples of both conversion and mystical experiences.

Weaker responses either were less than accurate in their presentation of scholars, for example some were unclear about James' use of Noetic. Whilst others seemed to be unaware of any scholarly work undertaken and thus attempted to answer the question by simply referring to some examples of both.

#### Part 10

The best answers recognised that the question here opened the discussion out beyond just conversion and mysticism, although it was entirely possible to answer the question by referring to these two only. Many focused upon the fact that religious experience is often regarded as a personal and subjective experience. They were able to go on and show how both process and characteristic would help both the recipient and others understand whether indeed there had been a religious experience or not. Many referred to Swinburne's Principles of Testimony and Credulity, but weaker responses failed to understand the differences between the two. In simple terms Testimony focuses upon the person whilst Credulity focuses upon the event.

### Question 6

#### Part 11

The focus of the question was clearly set down, religious experience and inspiration for the foundation of particular religion(s). The best answers were able to achieve the necessary balance between providing an examination of the religious experience and then demonstrating how the specific religious experience did indeed inspire foundation. Thus, for example, they considered Paul's conversion experience and then demonstrated that this led him onto to his missionary work particularly amongst the gentiles and how this moved the early Christian movement forward out of the Jewish world and this was very much the basis for the growth of Christianity. Some went on to also consider Paul's letters to the early Christian churches and what effect these also had on providing a foundation for Christian teaching.

Weaker responses either failed to link the particular religious experience to any aspect of foundation or they chose inappropriate examples. Thus it is difficult to argue that Moses' revelation experience on Sinai acted as a foundation for Christianity, and even more difficult to maintain that the Ten Commandments were the essential part of the revelation. Whilst it may have been possible to suggest that the Mosaic revelation was an essential element in the foundation of modern Judaism along with the 613 laws and the Torah, one would then need to establish how Judaism itself acted as part of the foundation for Christianity, this was not achieved by any of the weaker responses.

## **Part 12**

The best answers recognised that the question had been opened out to invite a discussion about the contribution of religious experiences to religion(s) today. They were able to show that the historic foundational revelation often still had value especially in the teaching or scriptures which arose from it. Some also considered that although this was usually the case there were also areas where the religion had moved on from the foundational experience and thus it was rendered less significant. Many then considered other religious experiences and the contribution they might make to the religion today, and this included conversion and mystical experiences as some of the key examples given.

Weaker responses often limited their evaluation to foundational experience and had little to say beyond 'yes, they were important otherwise the religion would not exist' and then 'no, they were not as they were outdated'. A number then moved away from the focus of the question and started to consider whether there could be such things as religious experiences and outlined arguments against such experiences. Much of this material remained largely irrelevant to the question. This was especially the case since the question asked about contribution to 'religions today'.



## **RST4B**

### **Section A Religious Fundamentalism**

This section was answered well on the whole, with many candidates having a good depth and breadth of knowledge to draw on. The fundamentalist movements chosen for study created issues for some candidates, the selection for study needs to meet the requirements set down in the Specification

#### **Question 1**

##### **Part 01**

Part 01 was generally well answered. Many candidates demonstrated a secure grasp of the required knowledge and understanding and worked hard to establish the nature of fundamentalism and how it has changed since the term was first used. Some spent too long focussing on the historical development of fundamentalism. Where candidates did trace too much history, they left themselves too little time to focus on the nature of fundamentalism, which is the key to this question. Certainly there was more emphasis on origins, sometimes rather obscurely or tenuously linked to fundamentalism, than there was on the present day. Conversely a few candidates failed to address the origins of fundamentalism at all.

##### **Part 02**

Part 02 was also well answered by some candidates, although a number did not relate their answers to developments in religion, and wrote rather more generally about how fundamentalism has reacted to developments in society.

#### **Question 2**

##### **Part 03**

Part 03 asked for an examination of the key beliefs and distinctive practices of one fundamentalist movement. Apart from the few candidates who wrote about more than one movement, candidates did well here in addressing both aspects of the question. There was no need for beliefs and practices to be dealt with in equal depth. Responses could have been improved in general with a little more 'examination' rather than simply 'description'; that is, explain the meaning and significance of the beliefs and practices rather than just say what they are.

A small number of candidates seemed to have studied either 'Christian fundamentalism' or 'Islamic fundamentalism' as a movement. Whilst not incorrect, it may be easier for candidates to focus on a specific group within the broader religion. If the study is broadened out to include the whole religion, it becomes difficult for candidates to identify key beliefs and distinctive practices that are held by all fundamentalists within a religion.

##### **Part 04**

Part 04 was well answered by the majority. Most addressed both the challenges to the wider religion and to society in general, although some seemed to struggle to find meaningful examples of the latter. The best answers not only stated what the challenges were, but also tried to give some sense of the extent to which this actually happens.

## **Section B Religion and Contemporary Society**

### **Question 3**

#### **Part 05**

The question asked about attitudes in contemporary society towards sexual behaviour, marriage and the family. Most candidates did deal with the topics specified, and few did not achieve a good balance between them. Unfortunately, many candidates simply reiterated traditional religious views, sometimes comparing and contrasting Christianity and Islam in very general terms and thus were not tackling the question fully.

Scriptural teachings and ancient views are unlikely to be of much use here, except in terms of showing how contemporary attitudes either stick closely to these or have rejected them. Many candidates gave lengthy expositions on the scriptural basis for marriage, for example. Some candidates offered arguments surrounding abortion, which were also not fully relevant.

There was very little reference to contemporary issues or changing attitudes in these areas, or to denominational differences. Many candidates did not go beyond the simple statement that some young Muslims now wish to marry for love rather than have an arranged marriage.

Some candidates dealt with broad changes in attitudes to homosexuality, but even here, there was little distinction between groups or denominations and almost no substantive evidence. Candidates addressing these topics need to be able to refer to specific religious documents or leaders. They should be able to explain in some detail the nature of the changing attitudes or the specific controversies involved. For example, the potential rift in the Anglican communion over gay clergy, or the criticisms levelled at the Roman Catholic Church over its stance on contraception and clerical celibacy in the light of the AIDS epidemic and the sexual exploitation of children. If changes in family structures are explored, reasons and evidence should be offered, and some discussion of religious attitudes to this, again with reference to specific documents or scholars.

#### **Part 06**

Part 06 asked whether these religious attitudes continually change. Most candidates grasped that this was a reference to the attitudes explored in 05, but some did not, and talked about changing attitudes to society in general or how religious believers have adapted their theology in the light of modern science. Some weaker candidates restated much of what they had said in 05 without really assessing whether the attitudes do continually change. Stronger responses gave specific examples of religious attitudes that have either changed or not to support their arguments.

### **Question 4**

#### **Part 07**

Part 07 was answered competently by most candidates. The strongest responses went beyond a statement of the problems faced by believers such as time and a clear space to pray, or discrimination from unbelievers; they also discussed how these problems constitute a challenge to faith and religious practice.

#### **Part 08**

The weakness in many responses to this question was that candidates seemed not to understand what is meant by the term 'assimilation'. The term appears in the Specification.

Many confused it with interfaith relations and ecumenism. Of course, ecumenical movements may lead to assimilation to an extent, but candidates who wrote about ecumenism did not explore the 'how' or why this happens.

## **Section C Religion and the Visual Arts**

### **Question 5**

#### **Part 09**

There were two main issues in the weaker responses to the question. Firstly, many candidates seemed to be much more adept at dealing with the presentation of religious figures than they were with the presentation of religious ideas. The former may well be easier than the latter, but there is no shortage of material for either. For example, how artists portray the afterlife, judgement, sin and salvation, and the extent to which they add to or distort traditional or scriptural motifs. Secondly, some weaker candidates simply described examples of how religious figures are portrayed in particular works, but did not explore the issues involved, which was what the question asked. Responses such as these are unlikely to achieve high levels of response.

Better answers discussed the nature of icons, their role in worship, and whether this constitutes idolatry or not. A few used architecture to illustrate their points. Some made valiant attempts to deal with the controversies and differing interpretations surrounding works by Caravaggio and Stanley Spencer, but some simply gave artists' biographies. By far the most common examples were Serrano's *Piss Christ* and Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*. Many candidates sought to answer the question with reference only to these two works, and given the similar nature of issues raised by these works, this meant that answers were limited in scope.

#### **Part 10**

Part 10 proved relatively straightforward for most candidates, who clearly picked up the difference between limiting artistic expression and limiting the approval and use of religious works of art. Many, however, again limited themselves to Serrano's and Ofili's works to illustrate their answers. This meant again that the evidence for their points was being stretched to fit the question. It would be easier for candidates if they were familiar with a wider range of works. Weaker responses offered little assessment and rather simply described the controversies surrounding particular works.

### **Question 6**

#### **Part 11**

This question tended to elicit detailed descriptions of specific works of art by Holman Hunt, Michelangelo, Caravaggio or Stanley Spencer, but many candidates struggled to go beyond this and explain the religious impact of these works. It may be helpful in future for them to distinguish between the religious impact these works may have on individuals and the broader religious impact in terms of how the works fit into religious movements such as the Reformation. Cranach may be a good example for study, although works by the artists mentioned above could have been more directly applied to the question.

## **Part 12**

For part 12 there were some very good answers to this question, with candidates exploring how ideas and beliefs link to emotional responses as well as cognitive processes, and how visual art can have educational value for the illiterate. Some strong answers explored the differing emphases in traditions from the East and West. Weaker answers tended to adopt a 'for and against' approach rather than attempt to develop a line of argument.

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## RST4C

### General Comments

On the whole, candidates responded well to the questions on this paper. Most candidates wrote at length on each part of the selected question, and displayed an in-depth grasp of the subject material. It needs to be said, however, that many candidates seemed to rely upon a paradigm of notes, apparently in the expectation that the paradigm would answer most of the likely permutations of questions that might arise on the different parts of the specification. For many candidates, knowing such a paradigm probably meant that they performed *less* well on the AO1 part of the question (parts 01, 03, 05, 07, 09, 11), since they clearly found it difficult to escape from the restrictions imposed by the paradigm. Paradoxically, for the AO2 part of the question (parts 02, 04, 06, 08, 10, 12), where candidates were forced to think outside the paradigm, candidates achieved strong responses.

### Section A Religious Authority

#### Question 1

##### Part 01

Candidates identified a wide range of secular challenges to religious authority. Perhaps the biggest challenge identified was that from secular science, for example the challenge from those who espouse Big Bang Theory concerning the origins of the universe as opposed to those who insist on a literal interpretation of creation texts; also those who refer to biology and genetics concerning the evolution of *homo sapiens* as opposed to those who accept the literal truth about the origins of humanity from an ancestral pair. Candidates also identified challenges from humanist sources concerned to eliminate all references to supernatural beings. Some candidates wrote at length about the challenge from secular philosophers such as Nietzsche, Marx and Freud. There were also many general references to challenges to the authority of religious leaders in particular. The best scripts were those which referred to a diversity of secular challenges, and which explained them in terms of their motivation and content. Weaker responses tended simply to list challenges without references to supporting material. Also, some inappropriately identified challenges to religious authority from within a religious system as being secular, for example the Protestant challenge to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

##### Part 02

Answers to this question covered a wide range of religious beliefs. For example some suggested that given the status of Islamic scriptures, unquestioning obedience was built in to Muslim approaches to scripture, hence religious authority in Islam perforce depends on religious belief and unquestioning obedience. Sometimes candidates went on to refute this suggestion on the grounds that Islam insists that humans have free will, so to follow any authority without questioning it goes against God-given free will. Others qualified this by suggesting that free will here refers to a rational assent to what the Qur'an teaches. With regard to Christian religious authority, some suggested that fundamentalist approaches to Christian scripture evoke different approaches to authority, in that unquestioning obedience to scripture can depend upon unquestioning obedience to religious figures, who in turn claim a divinely inspired authority to interpret it. One fruitful approach to this question was to suggest that there is an evolutionary and future element in all scripture and religious belief which allows for the reinterpretation of texts. 'True' religion always evolves as opposed to being a static system.

The strongest answers paid attention to the word 'entirely' in the question, claiming for example that there is an organic relationship between religious authority, religious belief and obedience, whether questioning or unquestioning. By contrast, weaker responses tended to reintroduce material already discussed in connection with part 01 without evaluating the assertion in 02.

## **Question 2**

### **Part 03**

Nearly all candidates began by saying that scripture is vulnerable to attack because there is often a gap between the time when the scripture was written and the form in which the scripture is now found. For example in the Christian New Testament, the Synoptic Gospels are generally held to have shared sources that were in part written, but which are now incorporated into the Gospels in a way which cannot be entirely reconstructed. There is always a problem therefore in so far as nobody can be sure that later authors have not altered their source material to suit some kind of individual religious approach. Most responses discussed this question from within the Christian tradition because the study of Christian scripture has developed a wide range of tools of analysis, such as text, literary, form, and redaction criticism. The combined import of these studies has been to attempt to discover the processes by which religious texts, which often began life in a spoken form, are now fixed within a written Canon. Analysis of this kind can lead scholars and other individuals who follow their discussions to challenge the authenticity of scripture, because it can be seen that scripture can contain anachronistic statements, historical inaccuracies, doubtful moral teaching, and so on. The simple fact is that once the authority of any text can be challenged, then the authority of the whole can be challenged also. Some candidates argued that in Western Christian tradition this has led to the challenge of increasing secularisation. Some made interesting comparisons with Islamic approaches to scripture where although such challenges are present within different interpretational schools, as a rule the authority of the Qur'an is not challenged in the same way. Candidates explored a variety of different paths including some who focussed on the enormous collection of Buddhist scriptures where issues of authority are entirely different, since the authority does not derive from a divine being.

### **Part 04**

Weaker responses to this question tended to rewrite material already used in 03, without forming any particular evaluative approach as to whether or not religion should adapt to meet any challenge to its authority. Those responses which took note of the word 'should' generally made a reasonable job of this question, and responses on the whole reached two broad conclusions. First, candidates concluded that religion has to adapt to meet challenges to its authority, otherwise that authority will be lost. Most candidates realised that the remit of part 04 did not need to confine itself to challenges to the study of scripture, and so they considered a wide range of challenges, primarily from secular science and from atheistic/agnostic philosophers who wish to challenge the authority of religion in controlling humanity. For example, some referred to the disastrous effects of atheistic Marxism on 20<sup>th</sup> century world affairs, when the authority of religion in general and of Christianity in particular declined because of the spread of atheistic communism which ousted religion from several countries by military means. Under such conditions religion adapted to meet that challenge so that, for example, Liberation Theology incorporated Marxism within its message. The second conclusion, which was not exclusive of the first, was that religion should resist challenges rather than adapt to them in order to maintain its authority and control. Such adaptation can be successful or unsuccessful depending on the context. For example, it is a matter of debate as to whether creation science (so called) is a successful adaptation to the challenges of science or whether it exposes religion to increased ridicule. Some candidates used language game

theory to argue that religion can always adapt to meet any challenge by adopting an anti-real approach, although this can hardly be seen as a mainstream adaptation by religious authority.

## Section B Ways of Moral Decision-Making

### Question 3

#### Part 05

One fundamental weakness of some essays here was that many candidates referred to non-religious theories of ethics in their answers, usually Kant and Utilitarianism, and thus those answers were partially or wholly irrelevant. Even where candidates did restrict their answers to examining how religion can help people to determine their behaviour, some responses were often very narrow, referring perhaps only to one type of religious ethical approach. Another frequent weakness was where candidates wrote extensively and knowledgeably on the subject but failed to say in a concrete way how religion **helps** people to determine their behaviour. The most obvious cause of this weakness was where candidates stuck rigidly to a paradigm, referred to in the general comments above, since the result was a tendency to list theories rather than to use knowledge to answer the question in the form that it was set.

Those who did deal with all aspects of the question for the most part looked at three things: a selection of texts dealing with general religious principles (e.g. those concerning the sanctity of life, murder, false witness, and so on); a deontological religious system such as Natural Law; a teleological religious system such as Situation Ethics. These were then applied to medical research / medical developments, or to business practice & economics, and this pattern often worked very well indeed. There were a few issues with the content of the chosen topic: for example, for *medical research & developments*, some candidates wrote about abortion and euthanasia in terms that were for the most part completely irrelevant to issues of “research and development”. Such material received no credit, except in those rare instances where candidates did discuss those topics in connection with medical *research and development*.

#### Part 06

There were some strong answers which followed the exact wording of the question, and dealt specifically with the “success” or otherwise of religion in helping “religious people” to deal with the ethical issues involved. The success was usually described in terms of how religious teachings of various kinds can clarify difficult issues for believers. Most candidates chose medical research and developments, and therefore talked about emotive and difficult issues concerning therapeutic and reproductive cloning, for example. Some liked the definitive answers given by Natural Law, and referred, for example, to the success of the Roman Catholic Church in helping to guide the ethical lives of over a billion Roman Catholic Christians. Equally some referred to the success of situation ethics in guiding Protestant Christians to make their own decisions based on Jesus’ *agape* principle. One common criterion of success was the ease with which members of the various religions can use scripture in order to guide their decisions in a simple way, e.g. the ten commandments in the theistic religions and the Eightfold path in Buddhism.

Quite a few candidates judged religion to be unsuccessful in helping religious people to deal with the ethical issues involved, primarily because the believer can be confused by the lack of agreement about moral issues shown by any one religion. Within any religious tradition there are fundamental disagreements and contradictions about ethics that can leave the believer in a minefield of uncertainty. Others dismissed this objection on the grounds that believers have a wide choice of sub-divisions within any religious tradition, and whereas the tradition as a whole

shows disagreement, the sub-divisions may be quite definitive, so believers can select any particular moral tradition that appeals to them.

Generally speaking, weaker responses to 06 ignored the key words, for example, “success”, and “religious people”, and in many cases simply wrote an extended version of what they had already said in answer to 05. More often than not this included irrelevant material from Kant, Utilitarian theories, Virtue Ethics and the like.

## Question 4

### Part 07

Most candidates wrote at great length on this question. For the ontological ethical systems, the most popular were Kant and Natural Law. For teleological systems, the most popular were the difference types of Utilitarianism, and Situation Ethics. This question, as with part 05, asked candidates how both ontological and teleological ethical systems can be used to **help** people make moral decisions, and as with part 05, many candidates ignored the issue of how this help can be given. The strongest answers said, for example, that Kant’s deontological system helps those who use it by providing them with three absolutely clear guidelines, namely the three main formulations of the categorical imperative. Universalizability, for example, is for most people an intuitive principle to understand. Candidates made similar comments about teleological systems: for example, Bentham’s pain/pleasure principle can be understood intuitively because everybody understands and experiences both pain and pleasure. For many utilitarians, Bentham’s version offers the most help because it gives them guidance on how to apply moral thinking to animals: animals are members of the moral community because they can experience both pain and pleasure. Similar comments were made about the *agape* principle at the centre of Fletcher’s Situation Ethics. Again, as with part 05, weaker responses simply listed deontological and teleological ethical systems, often in vast detail, assuming that giving such a list somehow answered the question. A few candidates confused the terms ‘deontological’ and ‘teleological’, getting them back to front. Some of the better responses primed their answers to 08 by pointing out that deontological systems contain teleological features, and teleological systems can, equally, contain deontological features.

### Part 08

The big issue with this question was of course the identification of the hybrid ethical systems under discussion. The weakest responses simply ignored the focus of the question on ‘hybrid ethical systems’ and made general comments about the strengths and weaknesses of deontological and teleological ethics, in most cases having evidently expected this question to appear on the paper. The inability to define a hybrid ethical system was one of the most significant weaknesses in the responses to this exam paper as a whole. Having said that, many candidates were very well prepared and achieved full marks for 08. The favoured hybrid systems for discussion were: Virtue Ethics, Situation Ethics, and Weak Rule Utilitarianism. Virtue Ethics was generally described as a system where a deontological or teleological focus was subsumed under the principle that morality should be about virtuous living. Situation Ethics was generally approved of as being a good hybrid because its teleological focus allows those who use the system to take account of the fluidity of modern developments in science and medicine whilst at the same time maintaining the absolute rule of love. The favoured hybrid system was, however, Weak Rule Utilitarianism, because it allows those who use it to follow the very simple process of obeying tried and tested rules, whilst at the same time allowing any rule to be subject to revision or suspension under the primary principle of utility. All in all, hybrid systems were praised for being able to take the best parts of deontology and teleology in order to produce the best moral result. Defences of standard deontological and teleological systems



were equally robust. Many pointed out that the majority of people need the assurance of following absolute rules, and pointed out further that where too much reliance is placed on human judgement (as in Situation Ethics for example), people can become convinced of their own moral perfection to the extent that they start to overrule and ignore the rights of others. Quite a few preferred Bentham's version of Utilitarianism, because, despite the difficulties of the hedonic calculus, it offers users a simple principle which is very flexible.

## Section C Ways of Reading and Understanding Scripture

### Question 5

#### Part 09

The vast majority of candidates who answered this question examined the status of the scriptures of Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. The most common discussion was whether or not scripture can be held to have an absolute status as the word of God, as in the theistic religions. In Christianity, for example, the main issue was perceived to be the meaning of the expression 'God-breathed', in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Most candidates pointed out that Christians are divided as to whether what is God-breathed reflects God's literal intention or has merely a metaphorical or symbolic status, allowing humans to have free will in interpreting scripture. For example, for those who take a literalist and fundamentalist approach to the status of scripture, this can be seen to be paradoxical because there has to be an authority outside scripture that can decide what the literal meaning of scripture is. Literalist/fundamentalist readings of scripture might be seen to have authoritative status for those who hold them, but clearly this status is not universal amongst Christians, since others maintain that scripture that cannot be adapted to current day issues is not living scripture, but is instead a dead word. Some candidates outlined similar debates concerning the status of the Qur'an, which functions as the basis for scriptural reasoning by which Muslims can reflect on their actions, and can determine whether or not they conform to the will of Allah. With the Buddhist scriptures, issues about status focused primarily on the fact that the Buddhist scriptures are not revealed. Most candidates were reasonably relevant in their responses. Weaker responses simply discussed the scriptures of one religion but made little or no attempt to assess their status.

#### Part 10

Most candidates argued successfully that it could be said that there are two main 'takes' on this question. First the statement is obviously untrue, since in some countries, the scriptures of their chosen religion are read and understood *only* in translation, yet most believers do not question their understanding that the translation is as valid as the original. In this context, some candidates discussed what others discussed for 09, namely that issues about the status of translated scriptures depend upon how the believer responds to the supposed original. In Islam, for example, scripture is perceived generally as being God's absolute word, in so far as the Qur'an was dictated to Muhammed through a divine agency. In this case the status of the Arabic original is paramount, but it still allows a translation to have equal authority where it is accepted that the translation is done also through divine inspiration. The second take on the question was that scripture has to adapt to ongoing situations in human life, in which case translations can be a part of that process of adaptation, for example where the translation uses modern idiom to *clarify* the meaning of the original. This process of clarification can take place at levels that are one or more degrees removed from original scripture: for example, in the Roman Catholic Church's replacement of the Latin Mass by versions translated into the language of the country concerned. In so far as the Latin Mass was itself a translation that was considered to be authoritative in its references to the scriptural passages on which it was based, then the fact that modern translations can include interpretation means that in this sense

translations can have the same kind of validity as the original, because they are the product of a legitimate process of interpretation. In other words, scripture can sometimes be translated into a number of different mediums yet still retain the authority of the original.

Both these ‘takes’ have their down side. The fact that large numbers of believers read their sacred texts only in translation means that they can neither understand, nor participate in, what many believers understand to be the intrinsic power of the original language, such as the Hebrew for the Torah and Arabic for the Qur’an. Even this is a two-edged argument, because in some religious traditions the supposed original has been lost. The New Testament was written in Greek, but at certain points the Greek retains Jesus’ original Aramaic words, presumably because they were considered to be words of power. This seems to imply that something would be lost by translation. It seems beyond dispute that translation inevitably changes the sense of the original, and so cannot have the same status as that original. Few doubt that translated scriptures can have a very *high* status, but that does not mean that the translation must have equal status with the original.

## Question 6

### Part 11

Candidates answered this question from a range of religious perspectives. There were some interesting comments about the relationship between humans and Ultimate Reality in Buddhism. For example, the Theravada school denies the existence of a personal God and denies the existence of any spiritual material substance that can be identified as Ultimate Reality. The universe operates as the sum total of its causal reactions, all of which are interdependent, and all of which are sufficient to explain the order we perceive. For that reason Ultimate Reality itself is a *transcendent* truth that is recognised by the human intellect, and in that sense Ultimate Reality governs human life. Most responses looked at one of the theistic religions and discussed the role of God in relation to humankind from a number of different standpoints, e.g. God as the creator of humans who thereby imprints his ‘image’ in humankind. Similarly God keeps the universe in existence ontologically, and humans are given the status of stewards of the world - they help to sustain it by being responsible for the environment as a whole. There are any number of similar epithets to be found in scripture that can be used to clarify the relationship between humans and God, e.g. *father, divine warrior, judge, redeemer*, and so on. In particular, most religions teach that the relationship between God and humans is defined by God’s moral commands, and these are specified in different scriptural books and teachings. Scripture also teaches that God can intervene in human history, for example through historical acts, through miracles, and through responding to prayer. The best answers to this question were defined simply by the accuracy and detail of the points selected by candidates.

### Part 12

There were at least two key words in this question which some candidates chose to ignore, namely “future” and “reliable”. The weakest responses simply wrote general comments about the contents of scripture, sometimes with no obvious theme or focus. Some discussed the value of the moral teachings in scripture, but neglected to make any mention of how these might be a guide to people’s *future*. Others did get as far as discussing the future, but then paid no attention to the question of whether or not scripture could be seen as a *reliable* guide to people’s future. The best responses tended to be those which arose organically from what candidates wrote for part 11. For example the moral teaching of scripture might be seen as a reliable guide people’s future in so far as those who follow it might on the one hand lead useful lives that benefit others, and on the other, following God’s moral commands is seen in the theistic religions as the key to an afterlife where morally correct behaviour is rewarded by

heaven, and the reverse is punished by hell. Some candidates argued that as God's revelation to humans, scripture is by definition a reliable guide to people's past, present *and* future. Quite a few candidates argued in favour of the opposing view, that scripture is neither reliable nor any kind of guide, since it is the product of human authors who invented what they wrote on the basis of some supposed religious experience: the invention gave them status and authority within the religious hierarchy at the time. Others, whilst being less dismissive than this, argued that extracting God's message from scripture can be a dubious process that seems to be guided as much by wishful thinking as by God: history records an endless sequence of predictions about future events which have been shown to be completely misguided.

Apocalyptic predictions from scripture are often bloodthirsty, and they cannot be disproved until the apocalypse happens. In one sense this means that scripture cannot be considered to be a reliable guide to people's future, because if there is no God, then apocalyptic can never be falsified if false. As the logical positivists pointed out, there is a strong case for arguing that non-falsifiable predictions are meaningless. This was powerful stuff, and it was good to see candidates thinking synoptically in this fashion.