

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE A2 H572

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H172

Report on the Units

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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 proved a very fair paper for candidates, though, as usual, it seemed to be too testing for some. A few candidates had obviously pre-prepared answers in the hope that they might fit possible questions, but most took the opportunity to respond in interesting ways to the questions set.

A particular problem for many was a failure to grasp the meanings of basic philosophical terms – some struggled with fundamental terms such as ‘prove’ (where often ‘argue’ was meant), ‘refute’ (where ‘deny’ was correct), ‘a priori’ (which does not mean ‘innate’), and so on, and a few thought ‘tautologous’ a philosophical term for nonsense.

Many candidates with a sound knowledge and understanding of the specification underperformed in the AO2 section of the questions. Answers were often taken captive by the idea that a theory is not believable until ‘proved’ – and what counts as proof was rarely made explicit. This left little else to be said about other ways of assessing whether a theory is credible or not, and answers then ran into a dead end. Similarly many candidates who had written a good quality answer for a part (a) question, then went on to state flatly that what someone thinks will depend upon their opinion. Again, with nothing much else to be said, candidates were left repeating themselves, without gaining credit for their pains. This lack of analysis is perhaps illustrated by a significant number of candidates’ plans for part (b) questions, where they simply listed a number of ideas/philosophers that they would mention, and then in the essay listed the ideas as if for an (a) question.

Some candidates handicapped themselves by very poor English and awkward expression. Despite instructions some candidates continued to write in blue ink or – less often – pencil. A few scripts were almost illegible, to the candidates’ disadvantage.

1a Explain Aquinas’ Cosmological Argument.

This question was often well handled, though the Third Way was sometimes confused with St Anselm’s *Proslogion* 3. A few candidates wrote only about St Anselm or the Teleological argument, to no avail. Better responses illustrated points with careful examples, though many made use of dominoes, incorrectly attributing the example to St Thomas himself.

There were some very strong answers to this question from candidates who understood Aquinas’ argument well enough to render it afresh. These candidates often produced an explanation of how an argument about the existence of God worked, rather than just a recital of the first three Ways.

Many candidates commented on Aquinas’ dependence on Aristotelian ideas about the Prime Mover and efficient causation. The third way from contingency/necessity was less well explained than the first two ways. They were able to explain contingency well enough, but not the concept of necessity, nor how a cosmos consisting only of contingent entities must have a necessary being as its cause.

1b To what extent were Russell's criticisms of the Cosmological Argument successful?

It was pleasing to see how many candidates were aware of the range of Russell's criticisms, though some were unable to develop the significance of his argument from 'brute fact.' The value of close study of this readily available debate was evident in better answers.

Many candidates still expressed the view that Russell did little more than claim that the origin of the universe could not be discussed. By way of contrast, some excellent answers discussed how Russell arrived at his position as a result of specific criticisms of the principle of sufficient reason. These candidates understood that Russell had given close consideration to how much it was reasonable to hope to explain about an event.

2a Explain Kant's moral argument for the existence of God.

There were some sound answers though a disappointing number of candidates still fall into the error of arguing either that moral commandments are – for Kant – innate or that God is a moral commander. Some candidates simply explained Kant's ethics, but there was also some subtle understanding of Kant's notion that he was providing a *practical* rather than a complete argument.

A significant number of candidates seemed to get the idea of reason, duty and the categorical imperative. Many also described the three principles of the categorical imperative and how it differs from a hypothetical imperative. A good number also made the 'ought implies can' point. However, not all managed to explain fully the concept of the *summum bonum*. They seemed to be unable to explain that it is the combination of moral virtue and happiness. Quite a number incorrectly made Kantian ethics teleological by suggesting that it is in order to be rewarded with the *summum bonum* that people do their duty. Some simply suggested that Kant says that God must exist because he gives us moral rules we have to follow.

2b 'Moral awareness has nothing to do with a god.' Discuss.

Few candidates noticed the subtlety of 'a god' in this question, but most were aware of arguments from Freud, sociology and other sources about the possible origins of moral awareness. Some cast answers in terms of the Euthyphro Dilemma, sometimes to very good effect.

Some also made quite good use of the Bible as evidence that morality comes from God, though not many referred back to Kant. Answers were often descriptive rather than analytical or evaluative. Better answers clearly distinguished between morality and moral awareness.

3a Explain the Analogy of the Cave in Plato's Republic.

This was unsurprisingly the most popular question on the paper and there were some outstanding answers, which demonstrated the ability to relate the events in the cave to Plato's philosophy. Some candidates would have benefited from a closer reading of the Analogy – there were some fanciful tales of puppets on tightropes, an escaped prisoner too shy to venture out of the cave because of the wind, cut-out figures on people's heads, and some odd parallels with people sitting on a sofa watching *East Enders*.

The weaker responses simply retold the story choosing to 'describe' instead of "explain". However, there were candidates who showed very good if not excellent understanding, often linking it to Plato's dualism and theory of the Forms. Even candidates who did not use technical terminology had an appropriate understanding of the meaning of this analogy. A few got a bit obsessed with the idea that it is Plato's critique of Athenian society and its politicians, and neglected to explain the concept of the Forms.

Some candidates need to revise in a more focused manner so that they are better prepared to explain the analogy – and thus understand that this explanation should be the brunt of their answer. This would avoid a number of answers that failed to link the analogy to the Forms. Equally it should be recognised that a true explanation is not simply a list of what different aspects of the analogy stand for. For example, the statement 'the sun represents the Form of the Good' invites further detail to attain higher marks.

3b 'The Analogy of the Cave tells us nothing about reality.' Discuss.

Some candidates simply repeated answers from part (a) but most attempted to answer the question. Some made good use of Aristotle's reservations about the Forms and a few made good use of criticisms of Popper and others.

This question completely bamboozled a significant number of candidates, including the ones who'd written good answers to part [a], as they simply failed to recognise that it is an allegory. For some reason they failed to make the connection between the Forms and reality. Better responses pointed out that this is only Plato's version of reality, and that we live in a world which values empirical knowledge because of science or because it keeps us safe. Some observed that Aristotle would have agreed with the statement, but they didn't really capitalise on this. Many said that the allegory does have an element of reality in that it shows that the path to enlightenment is a difficult one. Some just said that it's nothing like reality because people don't live in caves.

4a Explain the debate between Creationism and the Big Bang theory.

Too many candidates failed to note the part of the question about the debate, simply describing – with scant accuracy – the two positions. Creationism was taken by some as an opportunity to write pre-prepared answers on Paley and Darwin, with much irrelevance on evolution. Better candidates were aware that the debate was nuanced with many different approaches to each of the main positions. Weaker responses rather naively tended to assume that all Christians were Creationists (and Biblical literalists) while all scientists were atheists of the Dawkins stamp.

Very few candidates progressed beyond the purely descriptive to explain the debate as such. Some did mention that many Christians accept the Big Bang and see God as its cause, but again did not really do much to amplify this idea. For example, they didn't say that this might be used to support the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* (though it is doubtful from a textual perspective that this is what Genesis 1 says) since scientists think that nothing existed before the Big Bang. Similarly, there were some half-hearted allusions to the anthropic principle and the theory of intelligent design, but these were often not developed. Very few responses referred to Davies or Polkinghorne, or said that science only poses a threat to a 'God of the gaps' type of faith which many Christians simply do not hold. Even fewer talked about Gould's concept of NOMA, and that the view that 'science' = 'how' whereas 'religion' = 'why' is an oversimplification of this complex debate. The best responses demonstrated knowledge of the debate within Creationism itself and were able to explain the range of approaches (New Earth Creationism, Old Earth Creationism, Progressive creationism). Some candidates, although lacking the technical vocabulary did display some knowledge of the views of New Earth and Progressive creationism. More competent answers picked up on the fact that not all creationists have a quarrel with the Big Bang and attempted to outline the overlap between theories and attempts at reconciliation within the debate.

4b 'The Big Bang theory is no more believable than Creationism.' Discuss.

Some of the better responses to this discussion took advantage of the opportunity to weigh the evidence of faith and scripture against a variety of views, sometimes looking for points of harmony between beliefs as well as areas of disagreement. Those who had introduced the debate in part (a) were even able to move beyond the unconvincing assertion that science provides the 'how?' and religion the 'why?' and there were some valuable critiques of 'God-of-the-gaps' arguments.

Many candidates argued that science is more credible because it is supported by empirical evidence, but they often spectacularly failed to identify what that evidence consists of. Some simply said that creationism is perfectly valid because that's what the Bible says and people have believed it for a long time. Some better responses pointed out that when science uses the term theory it means something that has been established through scientific research, though many construed this term to mean that it's just been made up and therefore isn't any more believable.

Weaker answers tended to use this question as an opportunity to argue by asserting this or that belief.

G572 Religious Ethics

General Comments

Overall the performance of the candidates was varied. Some answers were very general, while others understood the full demands of the questions. Some candidates were well prepared for this examination and used their time to plan and write detailed answers, while others failed to read the questions carefully enough, and so underperformed.

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

1a Explain the concept of relativist morality.

This was a popular question and was answered satisfactorily by many, with the majority answering from a cultural relativist view point.

Some candidates used examples to illustrate their answers, such as polygamy versus monogamy.

Good answers referred to a range of relativist notions and used Utilitarianism and Situation Ethics as examples of more normative relativist theories of morality.

1b 'Relativist ethics are unfair.' Discuss.

This question elicited some very good discussions of what was meant by unfair and who would perceive relativist ethics as unfair.

Many discussed subjectivism and the inability of those who follow relativist ethics to object to anything others do – the Holocaust was often cited as an example.

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

2a Explain how a follower of Natural Law would respond to the issues raised by genetic engineering.

This was a popular question and was either answered very well or very poorly. Many candidates focussed on Natural Law, but failed to apply it fully to genetic engineering. Others discussed genetic engineering in most general terms, simply saying that it was unnatural, or equated genetic engineering with IVF.

However, there has been on the whole an improvement in the candidates' knowledge and understanding of genetic engineering, and many were able to make intelligent and perceptive comments on how the precepts of Natural Law might be applied to it. Candidates were also able to distinguish between acceptable and non-acceptable forms of genetic engineering.

2b 'Genetic engineering is ethically justified.' Discuss.

Straight-forward answers simply discussed the merits of Utilitarianism as an approach to genetic engineering, generally coming down in favour as it made most people happy, and saved lives.

Better responses also considered religious approaches such as Situation Ethics and Natural Law in their approach to the issue.

3a Explain why a follower of religious ethics might object to euthanasia.

There were many unsatisfactory answers to this question, with little evidence that religious ethics had been studied properly. The result was that many answers were limited to the Sanctity of Life and the command 'not to murder'.

Those candidates who produced good answers were able to contrast the different approaches found in Christianity from Biblical ethics to Natural Law, Church teachings and Situation Ethics. Many candidates here are to be congratulated for the breadth and depth of their answers. Other good answers also discussed the role of conscience.

There were many very poor responses where candidates simply wrote about the objections of every ethical theory they had studied from Utilitarianism to Kantian ethics.

3b 'Human dignity does not matter to a follower of religious ethics.' Discuss.

Many candidates forgot that the question was about human dignity in relation to religious ethics and simply argued a case for euthanasia, often using Diane Pretty as an example.

Those who did consider religious ethics were often very limited and argued that religions do not take human dignity into account because they forbid euthanasia.

Better responses were able to make more detailed analyses of how human dignity might be preserved by refusing euthanasia. Some also discussed how human dignity was assumed by followers of religious ethics as humans are made in the image of God, but that this notion is less important than doing the commands of God.

4a Explain the strengths of Kant's theory of ethics.

Many candidates only wrote about Kant and his theory of ethics without explicitly stating the strengths or developing them. Unfortunately, although they knew Kant, they did not attain very high marks as they failed to look at the strengths of Kant's moral philosophy. Other candidates wrote all they knew about Kant and by chance covered the strengths on his theory.

Better answers focussed on the strengths as they explained the theory.

4b 'Kant's theory of ethics is not a useful approach to abortion.' Discuss.

Answers were generally good, explaining that it is difficult to universalise a duty to perform abortion, and that as Kant would not consider circumstances and motivations it makes dealing with abortion very inflexible. Many answers, however, assumed that Kant supported the Sanctity of Life and so would oppose abortion.

A few answers discussed whether Kant would consider the foetus to be a person or not.

Some compared Kant to other ethical approaches, arguing for a deontological or a teleological approach to abortion.

G573 Jewish Scriptures

General Comments

The four questions were equally accessible and equally popular whilst achieving the intended differentiation.

Rubric infringements were rare and most candidates managed to complete the paper within the one hour 30 minute time limit. Most candidates addressed the questions according to the two assessment objectives but some candidates seemed to think that they had to debate Part (a) of the questions. The main weakness was a tendency to regurgitate lesson notes without due regard to engaging with the wording of the questions. Many relied on story telling and general knowledge. There were, however, some excellent responses which quoted the set texts appropriately, made reference to issues of date, authorship, purpose and historicity when relevant and were a pleasure to read. Most candidates of all abilities seemed to have enjoyed their studies and to have benefited from them.

1a Explain what is meant by 'prophecy' when describing some of the writings in the Jewish Scriptures.

Most responses began with an introductory summary of the contents of the TeNaKh [Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), Ketuvim (Writings)] to introduce the variety of material found in the Jewish Scriptures. The grouping of the books is different in both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Bibles from that of the Hebrew Scriptures and the grouping in the Protestant Bible also varies. Candidates were free to use, as examples, prophets and prophetic material from any traditional grouping. There were a few very weak essays dealing in general with the topic. Only a few took the opportunity to define the term 'prophet' but those who attempted to do so usually included reference to seers, priests, ecstatic prophets, schools of prophets, false prophets and court prophets.

To address the question, some candidates explained the role of the prophet as a spokesman of the word of G-d to his contemporaries, foreteller and forthteller etc. Others distinguished between material which contains stories about the prophets (like the Elijah stories and the book of Jonah) and the canonical preservation of their actual oracles.

1b How important for understanding the Jewish Scriptures is knowing the type of literature which is being studied?

Myth, history, prophecy, poetry, law, wisdom (hohma) and liturgy feature in the specification and examples of these could have been used in the responses but some candidates had no idea about the types of literature found in the Jewish Scriptures. Very few discussions moved beyond GCSE level. A few candidates concentrated on the book of Jonah, mainly to warn against taking some stories too literally. Very few had any real idea about Form Criticism apart from the value of being able to distinguish Laws like the Ten Commandments from poetry and myth. Some candidates acknowledged the fact that the Jewish Scriptures contain different kinds of literature but argued against any significant value of any type of literary analysis when studying revealed sacred writings. A few conceded that knowing the message and purpose might be helpful to the reader.

2a Explain the impact on Job of G-d's words from the whirlwind.

Chapter 38 is the dramatic moment where G-d speaks to Job for the first time. The speeches go on to the end of chapter 41 in the same vein but only chapter 38 is a set passage.

'Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?' tended to be the only quotation used in most responses but most knew that the chapters were full of magnificent poetry. Some lacked specific knowledge of the text but were able to recount the storyline of the whole book, with details of Job's dilemma, the arguments with his friends and the restoration at the end. Unfortunately some were not sure where G-d and the whirlwind came into the story and thought G-d was speaking from the gale that struck Job's house at the beginning.

Some candidates did manage to explain that the impact of the experience of hearing G-d's words causes Job to accept that because he is mortal he cannot understand divine wisdom nor divine justice.

2b 'The last chapter of Job makes nonsense of the rest of the book.' Discuss.

Most candidates managed this part a little better because they could see the apparent illogicality of Job getting everything back if this was an exploration of why the innocent suffer and in view of Job's eventual acceptance of his fate. Some were quite incensed at the idea that a new family could make up for losing the old family. Letting Job be tested by the Adversary in the first place was also unfair. A few candidates thought the whirlwind chapter must be the last chapter and so wrote very little worthy of credit. Some very good discussions, however, considered the purpose of the author, the type of literary material and the structure, and classified the book as hohma, wisdom literature, exploring the problem of pain. Some were aware of the theory that the eloquent poetic debate which makes up the main part of the book has been introduced into a well known proverbial traditional story or play. The ending might then be a wry recitation of the original ending.

3a Explain the significant features of the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel.

This is the first time that candidates have had the opportunity in this specification to study stories about the prophet Elijah and the responses were somewhat disappointing. This was mainly because candidates had little idea of the historical and geographical background that led to the significant work of Elijah in the reign of King Ahab whose Queen, Jezebel, was a Phoenician worshipper of Baal.

There were some excellent accounts, however, which started with Obadiah assuming that prophets like Elijah could disappear at will and ended with Elijah running in prophetic ecstasy before the chariot of Ahab towards Jezreel. Crucial to good explanations of the confrontation on Carmel was the challenge that the fertility cults of neighbouring agricultural communities presented to the Israelite faith in the G-d of their history. The scene on Carmel serves to expose the prophets of Baal as frauds. The miracle of fire, the slaughter of the prophets of Baal and then the coming of rain confirms the superiority of the G-d of Israel over all Canaanite nature gods.

3b 'Elijah learnt more about G-d on Mount Carmel than on Mount Horeb.' Discuss.

Those who knew the story started after the ecstasy of the victory on Carmel, when Elijah was afflicted by despair and took flight because of the threats of Jezebel. Like Moses he went to Horeb/Sinai. Perhaps there he hoped to find G-d. Obviously the best comparisons required detailed knowledge and understanding of the set texts. The details of the theophany including the commission to anoint Hazael, Jehu and Elisha are found in the set passage I Kings 19 in verses 1-18. It shows G-d in charge of history and even in Syria. Some candidates argued in favour of the impact of witnessing the power of G-d on Mount Carmel. Others tried to balance this against the fact that G-d was not found in the dramatic natural phenomena of wind, earthquake and fire but in a 'still small sound', interpreted usually as the voice of conscience and that this was an even more profound experience for the future of Judaism.

4a Explain why the covenant in Jeremiah 31 is described as 'the new covenant'.

Some candidates began by explaining that Jeremiah's prophecy is called the new covenant because that's what the covenant calls itself in Jeremiah 31:31. Most could provide a potted biography of Jeremiah and the context in which he was writing in the 7th century BCE. The Jews needed encouragement in their faith because the Exile in Babylon had brought loss of king, Temple, city and land. The covenant needed to be reappraised in this desperate situation.

Those who could quote from the set text were able to show that it encourages contrasts and parallels with the Sinai covenant in 31:31-34. Jeremiah's emphasis on the internalisation of religion helped the survival of hope and laid the path for a deeper spiritual dimension in human religious experience.

Christian interpretations were acceptable as long as they were acknowledged as such and the explanation paid due attention to the passage in its original Jewish milieu.

Some candidates commented that usually the new covenant is said to concentrate on personal as opposed to corporate religion but the context foresees a restoration of land and, with the ingathering of the exiles, a reunited Israel and Judah.

4b 'Jeremiah's covenant is not the most important covenant in the Jewish Scriptures.'

The covenants in the specification are those with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David as well as Jeremiah. Candidates were free to argue in favour of any one or any combination of these contenders as 'most important' and did so very well. Moses and Abraham were popular contenders.

The candidates usually included in their discussions the fact that the Jeremiah covenant is described in the text as 'new' and they tended to explain that this 'new' covenant presupposes the continuation of previous covenants rather than intending to supersede them. Some concluded that therefore all covenants are as important as the others. Most candidates seemed at ease with the fact that Jews and Christians have different perspectives on Jeremiah chapter 31. Centres are reminded that the examination 'is open to any religious persuasion or none' as per the specification.

G574 New Testament

General Comments

The unit appeared to be accessible and challenging for candidates and overall, there was a high standard of performance. The combination of topics proved popular. There was an opportunity for candidates to answer questions on both the New Testament background and more than one gospel and to demonstrate the level of their knowledge and understanding of the genre of the gospels and the set text. Candidates who could write succinctly had the best opportunity of reaching the highest levels, especially on topics with a high content level such as questions 1 and 4. Generally speaking, the questions appeared to bring out good and excellent responses from candidates showing engagement with the topics. Only a very few candidates failed to reach an appropriate standard.

1a Explain the impact that the Roman occupation had on Jewish life and religion in first century Palestine.

This was a popular question. This question was generally well answered with a variety of evidence which gave candidates ample opportunity to demonstrate their breadth of knowledge and understanding on this subject. A high percentage of candidates achieved marks for a very good or excellent level of response. The best candidates addressed both the political and religious life of first-century Palestine. Even in weaker responses it was the brevity of the answer rather than lack of knowledge which disadvantaged candidates. A minority of answers merely listed descriptions of different Jewish groups.

1b 'The Jews should have worked harder at making a compromise with the Romans.' Discuss.

Most candidates offered a balanced view in response to this statement and showed awareness of the compromises made on both sides and the best answers also offered an evaluation of the popular historical myths that have grown up about this era. Some weaker answers dealt with only the Jewish or Roman side of the question.

2a Explain the purpose of source criticism of the Gospels.

This was another popular question and one to which many candidates gave an excellent response.

The majority of candidates were familiar with the various approaches and chronology of source criticism in attempting to find solutions to the 'synoptic problem' but the weaker responses did not always grasp the reasons why scholars saw it as so important. A few candidates wrote at length about form criticism and only briefly about source criticism. It was evident from the better responses that candidates enjoyed engaging with the topic and analysing the conclusions.

2b 'It would have been better if only one gospel had been written about the life of Jesus.' Discuss.

There were some very good, well balanced arguments in answer to this question. However, there was a tendency on the part of some candidates to argue cogently about the value of more than one gospel but to neglect or become confused about a different view. Arguments and evidence in support of a single gospel did not appear to have been thought through and were often superficial. Arguments also rarely took into account redaction or possible editorial bias in all gospels, as a weakness as well as a strength.

3a Explain the roles of Judas and of Peter in Mark's Passion story.

The best answers explored the role of both disciples, in depth and showed accuracy to Mark's account.

However, a sizeable proportion of answers were hazy on details and mixed in details from Matthew, especially about Judas. A fair number of answers were also unbalanced with greater details about one of the disciples than the other. The majority of these offered accurate details about Judas and his betrayal of Jesus but only sketchy details about Peter's denial. Most answers showed some level of awareness of Jesus' predictions about the disciples at the Last Supper and an understanding of the nature of their divinely ascribed roles, which could be developed further in the answers to Part (b).

3b To what extent is it true to say that Judas had the most important role in the Passion Story?

The majority of answers concentrated only on evaluating the role of Judas and his betrayal of Jesus, which led to the crucifixion, to the exclusion of other important characters in the Passion Story, not least Jesus himself. Balanced answers achieved the higher levels of marks and there were some very good attempts to compare and contrast roles of prominent characters even where the most evident conclusion, that Jesus might have had the most important role, was missing. Answers which were confined to Mark's Passion Story or used other gospels as well were credited equally.

4a Compare the account of the resurrection in Matthew with the ending of Mark.

This question required comparison and explanation of the significant features of the two accounts from Matthew 28:1-15 and Mark 16:1-8 and 9-18. It was the least popular choice and only a few excellent answers included the main details from both gospels.

Unfortunately the general trend was to offer a muddled and incomplete account of events in both gospels and only a few candidates included the problem with the ending of Mark. Some candidates would have fared better with a more detailed knowledge of the set text.

4b 'Mark's account of the resurrection of Jesus is more reliable than Matthew's account.' Discuss.

Candidates who made the best responses argued that the resurrection might not be a matter of evidential fact, belief in the resurrection is simply a matter of faith. Some were able to, in some part, compensate for their lack of detailed knowledge of the accounts by using arguments from source criticism to defend the validity of one or both gospel accounts. Generally, performance on this evaluation mirrored the level of achievement in Part (a) with some excellent answers and some very weak ones.

A balanced view might consider the validity of both accounts.

G575 Developments in Christian Theology

General Comments

There were very few poor answers and a gratifyingly high proportion of good and very good answers. It was pleasing to see how well candidates had mastered the Foundations of Theology and the intricacies of contemporary theology and philosophy. There were some outstanding answers which clearly indicated how some candidates had read well beyond the specification (eg. inclusion of existentialism, Hegel, foundationalism etc).

1a Explain Calvin's teaching on natural and revealed knowledge of God.

Many candidates showed a fine understanding of Calvin and were able to trace his teaching on natural and revealed knowledge with considerable accuracy. There were few disastrous scripts but candidates often omitted the place of sin and Adam's fall in Calvin's scheme.

Some thought that Calvin rejected natural theology all together, some saw it as a chance to write at length on Barth. Some candidates had a good overview but structured their answer randomly so paragraphs jumped between natural and revealed.

In general a little more commentary, use of technical expressions and explanation were needed.

1b 'God cannot be known.' Discuss.

Some candidates merely repeated their previous answer on Calvin. Others used Calvin judiciously as a catalyst for discussion and considered the key issue which is the nature of knowledge and especially what it means to know in terms of relationship.

Many used Barth effectively to set up a contrast to Calvin.

Weaker candidates used atheism as the counter argument to Calvin or outlined arguments for the existence of God.

2a Explain James Cone's teaching on the person of Christ.

Most candidates were able to talk about the importance of the Christ of faith and history for Cone and were able to discuss the significance of Exodus, Jesus' racial identity and the relationship of Jesus' blackness in terms of ontology and symbol.

Some missed out Cone's criticism of the Christ in white Christian consciousness and some thought that he claimed that God was actually black.

2b 'The historical Jesus is not the same as the Christ of faith.' Discuss.

There were some excellent answers here and candidates showed a very good understanding of the various christological debates from the 19th century to the present day.

Many supported Cone's rejection of the Jesus of history/Christ of faith distinction on the grounds that if Jesus' actions (as liberator) are to *mean* anything, then they cannot be divorced from theology otherwise he is of no greater significance than any other first century rebel.

There were fewer supporters of the liberal position perhaps because this position is harder to articulate.

3a Explain what liberation theologians mean by the term a 'preferential option for the poor'.

This was a popular question and generally well done. Most candidates were able to describe the key elements of liberation theology bringing out how it has developed the preferential option for the poor.

Some candidates gave lengthy historical introductions and therefore left themselves little time for the key parts of the theory. Better answers tended to make direct reference to key biblical texts and to the mediations.

3b 'Poverty is the most important issue for theologians.' Discuss.

A common mistake here was simply to assume that theology only referred to liberation theology which made constructing a counter argument difficult. Better candidates realised that there were other theologies – black, feminist, queer etc and were able to pinpoint the key issues of each.

Surprisingly few candidates mentioned that theology is such a broad term that it can include history, philosophy and applied theology etc. Very few used their knowledge from the Foundations of Theology and compared liberation theology with Aquinas or Augustine, for example.

A rather alarming number of candidates thought Marx was a theologian!

4a Explain the influence of Latin American liberation theology on one other theology of liberation.

This was not a popular question. Weaker candidates tended to write all about Latin American liberation theology and end with a paragraph on another theology of liberation.

Better candidates made direct comparisons between liberation theology and mainly North American black theology drawing out the importance of the figure of Jesus, hermeneutics, conscientization etc.

4b Assess the view that liberation theology no longer has any relevance.

Some candidates thought Latin American liberation theology had had its day, others thought it still had an important job to do.

Only the best answers recognised the scope of the phrase liberation theology and were able to see how it adapted to changing circumstance such as the evolution of some strands of black theology into womanism.

G576 Buddhism

General Comments

Most candidates coped well with the new exam structure, and there were very few rubric errors. Though most candidates did not write significantly more there was evidence that they were using the additional time to plan their answers before they began.

Many candidates showed good background knowledge of Buddhism, and in general it appeared they had studied the specification topics well. A common weakness was addressing part of the question, or missing a key term within the question, for example not addressing the issue of the importance of the accounts of the life of the Buddha in question 1(a).

1a Explain the importance, for Buddhists, of traditional accounts of the life of the Buddha.

Candidates tended to miss the word importance in the question. Weaker responses tended to describe aspects of the traditional accounts of the life of the Buddha without any context, or attempt to link the various aspects together.

Most candidates described aspects of the life of the Buddha, for example his enlightenment, and then explain why it was important, for example in providing an inspiration for other Buddhists.

The best responses tended to move directly to explaining the importance of the accounts, only describing these accounts where necessary to illustrate the point they were making.

1b 'Accounts of the life of the Buddha are too unrealistic to contain any truth.' Discuss.

Many candidates appeared to want to address the question of whether the accounts were believable, without necessarily considering whether they contained any truth. In weaker responses this led to retelling of the more mythical aspects of the accounts with little analysis. Better responses tried to explore the purpose of the accounts assuming they were not true. The very best responses explicitly addressed the nature of truth.

2a Explain the trikaya doctrine in Mahayana Buddhism.

This was the least popular question in the exam. While there were a few weaker responses most candidates who attempted this question had a thorough grasp of the topic. They were able to explore all three aspects of the trikaya doctrine in detail.

2b 'The trikaya doctrine makes the concept of the Buddha easier to understand.' Discuss.

Most candidates argued that the trikaya doctrine helped Mahayana Buddhists understand the concept of the Buddha, but was of little value to Theravada Buddhists. The best responses offered convincing evidence in relation to the way the Buddha is understood in both traditions.

3a Explain the importance of the Four Noble Truths for Buddhists.

Candidates tended to miss the word importance in the question. Weaker responses tended to offer superficial summaries of the Four Noble Truths, but were unable to expand their description beyond the type of summary which might be found in KS3 textbooks. Midrange answers tended to offer better explanations of the Four Noble Truths, for example discussing the different types of dukkha when exploring the first noble truth. They then offered a one paragraph conclusion on their importance at the end of their essay. The best responses tended to explore the issue of the importance from the very beginning of the essay, and thread it through their explanation of the truths.

3b To what extent is the first noble truth more important than the other three?

Many candidates tended to make statements without fully justifying them in their responses. They often appeared to be rote answers, rather than their own considered ideas. In some cases candidates seem to feel that making a statement such as 'dukkha is the whole focus of Buddhism' is an argument in itself, needing no further exploration. Better responses offered clear arguments and analysis, reaching a variety of conclusions about the relative importance of the first noble truth.

4a Explain the relationship between the laity and the monastic sangha.

Weaker responses often demonstrated limited understanding of the monastic tradition, or the relationship between the laity and the monastic sangha. Descriptions of the monastic sangha were given, but were often inaccurate or very superficial. Most responses offered a more accurate account of life within the monastic sangha, and the reciprocal relationship with the laity. The best responses explored the nature of the relationship explicitly, and the strengths it gives Buddhism as a whole.

4b 'Bhikkhus and bhikkhunis are selfish in seeking nibbana for themselves.' Discuss.

Weaker responses tended to agree with the statement, but offered little in the way of argument to support this view. The best responses explored the nuances of the word selfish, considering whether it was possible to be selfish as an arhat, and were often aware of the support offered to the laity by the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis.

G577 Hinduism

General Comments

In general most candidates were well prepared for the paper, and showed a good understanding of the topics examined.

Most candidates used the time available well, and answered (a) and (b) sections in an appropriate level of detail. There were no rubric errors.

1a Explain the main religious features of the Indus Valley civilisation.

Most candidates were able to describe the main features of the Indus Valley Civilisation and offer some explanation of their significance. The best responses focused on the specific religious features such as the female figurines or the presence of two hearths, and explained clearly how these features might link to religious practices within the Indus Valley Civilisation.

1b 'The Indus Valley civilisation teaches us nothing about later Hinduism.' Discuss.

Most candidates explored the ways in which the findings of the Indus Valley Civilisation might be related to modern Hinduism adequately. The best responses considered whether these findings helped us understand Hinduism better, or were interesting but ultimately irrelevant to those who wish to study current Hindu beliefs and practices.

2a Explain the importance of dharma for Hindus.

Most candidates were able to explore the Hindu concept of dharma to some degree. Many focused on the varnashramadharma system, though some explored the teachings on dharma in the Bhagavad Gita. The best responses explored why dharma was important for a Hindu, for example the influence it had on his marriage or working life.

2b 'Dharma is the most important concept within Hinduism.' Discuss.

Most candidates concluded that the statement was correct, and were able to offer some reasoning to support their conclusion. The best responses tended to compare the influence of dharma on a Hindu's life with another concept such as kama or moksha before reaching a conclusion.

3a Explain the importance of Siva for Hindus.

Too few candidates answered this question for meaningful feedback.

3b To what extent can Siva be seen as an evil god?

Too few candidates answered this question for meaningful feedback.

4a Explain the importance for Hindus of practising puja.

Weaker responses tended to offer descriptions of puja with little explanation of them. Most candidates however were able to explore the meanings of at least some of the practises associated with puja.

The best responses considered the importance of the practice of puja for different Hindus, for example those following the bhakti or jnana paths. In exploring the bhakti path these responses tended to explore the concept and importance of darshan in some depth.

4b 'Puja is a waste of time.' Discuss.

Most candidates argued that responses to the statement would be affected by the path being followed by the individual Hindu. Discrimination in the responses occurred based on the quality of analysis and thought demonstrated by candidates as they presented evidence to support this view.

G578 Islam

General Comments

The four questions were virtually equally popular, seemed to be of equal parity of access and differentiated well. Some candidates gained full marks and some scripts were a pleasure to read but it seemed that many candidates found the transition from GCSE to AS level too difficult. This was evident from their immature essay writing and poor preparation for the examination. A few struggled with basic concepts, for instance, confusing salah and saum. One candidate thought that Muhammad ﷺ was the Son of God and one whole small centre wrote that Muslims faced Makkah because that is where Allah was born.

1a Explain why, for Jews, Pesach is such an important Pilgrim Festival.

Explain the importance for Islam of Muhammad's ﷺ early life in Makkah.

Most candidates could answer on the early life of Muhammad ﷺ but some found difficulty in addressing 'the importance for Islam' in the question. There were some competent responses from those who saw significance in the fact that Muhammad ﷺ was orphaned at an early age. Candidates related this to his concern for orphans and women when he established the community in Madinah as evidenced in Surah 4. A few candidates made insightful comments about the socio-economic environment into which Muhammad ﷺ was born and about the Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Pagan influences on the religious background. Understanding these factors was said by candidates to be important because, along with his honest truthful character, it helped Muhammad ﷺ to be a wise politician as well as a prophet. Some candidates took early life to include everything up to the migration to Madinah which was acceptable. The most common choices to be designated as important by these candidates were the revelation of the Qur'an and the miraculous Night Journey.

1b 'Muhammad's ﷺ life in Makkah was more important for Islam than his time in al-Madinah.' Discuss.

Most candidates agreed with the stimulus quotation, based their discussion on what they had already written about the early life of Muhammad ﷺ and argued that the revelation of the Qur'an was important for his role as prophet and for the whole future of Islam which made Makkah the more important. The supporting arguments from some weaker candidates showed that they were confused about the two places and thought Muhammad ﷺ built the first mosque and established his model community in Makkah and was buried there. Some thorough responses outlined the importance of both places before coming to a decision. For some candidates the points in favour of Madinah, as the centre of the work uniting many of the tribes of Arabia whilst establishing the ground rules for the Ummah, were seen as equally important for Islam.

2a Explain how the structure of the Qur'an relates to the process of its revelation.

Candidates had a tendency to produce the all-purpose essay on the Quran starting with an account of Muhammad ﷺ in the cave on Mount Nur during Ramadan. Most knew that the revelations began in 610 CE and described how they continued till 632CE and explained about the learning by rote and writing on assorted media until the fragments were eventually placed in Hafsa's chest. Some managed to tailor the response to fit the question but some did not even try. Better responses also covered the time after the death of Muhammad ﷺ up to 'Uthman's decision about the ordering of the surahs according to length, apart from Surah 1, al-Fatihah. A few candidates thought Iqra must be near the beginning and therefore the shorter surahs came first. There were some interesting essays from candidates who took the opportunity to explain that scholars try to work out whether particular Surahs or some ayat were revealed in Makkah or in Madinah and that Surah 4 was likely to have been revealed in Madinah because of the internal evidence. A few candidates did not seem to understand the word 'structure'. Some, however, knew all sorts of information, not only that there are 114 surahs but that there are 77,639 words and 323,618 letters.

2b To what extent was the Qu'ran a new revelation as well as a final one?

The question assumes by the words 'as well as' that the Qur'an is recognised as a final revelation for Muslims so the main thrust of discussions was expected to be the extent to which the revelation was new. It became clear that many candidates were reading the sentence as if it said 'and' so both readings were accepted and marked according to the level of the response. Qur'anic references to previous prophets and books before Muhammad ﷺ were referred to in quite a few discussions and often identified (the Sahifah of Ibrahim, the Tawrah of Musa, the Zabur of Dawud and the Injil of Isa). Sometimes they were used to show the message was not new and other times, equally validly, because they were corrupted, they were used to show that the Qur'an was new. Sometimes the argument hinged on the existence of the heavenly eternal original of the Qur'an. Some candidates widened the discussion to include later books in other faiths.

3a Explain the important features of the way Muslims perform salah.

The pre-prepared all-purpose salah essay was evident but usually fitted to some extent. Preparations were not mentioned in the question but many candidates pointed out that they are essential if the prayers are to be valid. There were many competent descriptions of the preparations for salah and detailed accounts of the prayer movements. It was the explanation of the importance, meaning or symbolism of the features that differentiated between the levels of the responses. The importance of niyyah was emphasised by some candidates. Others included significant features of Salat-ul-Jumu'ah when Muslims gather in obedience to Sura 62:10 for Zuhr prayers.

3b 'Performing salah is the most difficult part of being a Muslim.' Discuss.

There were many possible approaches to this discussion and each provided the full range of responses. There were some heartfelt essays full of evidence about the difficulties of praying five times a day. Most responses pointed out that Salah is regarded by many Muslim scholars as the most important and most rewarding of the practical pillars. That being so, the candidates still thought it was difficult. Some saw the question as the perfect chance to write a Five Pillars essay, usually with the conclusion that they were all as difficult as each other but in different ways.

4a Explain the beliefs about Allah expressed in the shahadah and in Surah 1.

Some candidates simply quoted the Shahadah and Surah 1, al-Fatihah, and did not attempt to explain the beliefs. Most candidates began by explaining that the shahadah is the declaration of faith which is said in order to become a Muslim and how it is the first thing heard at birth and the last at death. Those who explained key words and ideas tended to include monotheism, Allah as Creator and Sustainer; Ruler of the Day of Judgment; and attributes such as grace and mercy. Most went on to include the concepts of tawhid and shirk.

4b 'Surah 1 contains all that is needed to be a Muslim.' Discuss.

Some candidates simply argued that the statement is wrong because, as long as you really meant it, confessing to acceptance of the Shahadah is the basic commitment for being a Muslim. Most discussions worked through the beliefs and ideas explained in part (a) and decided the extent to which belief might involve more than knowledge of what Surah 1 says about Allah. Some went on to consider the phrase 'all that is needed' to be a Muslim. Muslim practices do not feature in detail in Surah 1- and this fact was used in the discussions. Some felt the Five Pillars were essential if 'to be a Muslim' means more than just 'becoming a Muslim'. Some pointed out that by implication the surah contains all that is needed because the end of Surah1 asks Allah 'to show us the straight way' and this is the introduction to the Qur'an.

G579 Judaism

General Comments

Overall, candidates performed quite well and there were several outstanding scripts from those who had read around the subject. The principal weakness was a failure to focus on the question; this was particularly evident in Q1 where several candidates merely wrote down any facts that seemed relevant to or contiguous with Pesach. High marks in part (b) questions were frequently scored by those able to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of contrasting schools of thought or traditions.

There were no common misinterpretations of the rubric, although the examiners were concerned that several candidates answered only one question. A number of candidates spent much too long on their first question with the inevitable result that they left themselves scoring less well on the second.

1a Explain why, for Jews, Pesach is such an important Pilgrim Festival.

Answers to (a) were generally sound although weaker candidates could often do no more than give a GCSE-style answer, stating what happens on Pesach. The question focused on the importance of Pesach for Jews, and candidates were often quick to seize on this, most focusing on the Divine intervention in history and how this is related in the Seder ritual. Some explained the agricultural aspects of the festival. Some included excellent discussion of how the festival illustrates the meaning of 'a holy people'.

1b 'The most important teaching about Pesach is for Jews to live the festival as though they themselves had just escaped from Egypt.' Discuss.

Answers to (b) were varied. Many accepted the validity of the statement, while others wished to emphasise other details from the teachings and traditions of the festival, in particular, the message of hope it gives to all who are oppressed.

2a Explain the role of the Jews as a 'chosen people'

This was a popular question. Nearly all candidates explained the choice of Israel in terms of obligation and service. Some made reference to the covenants with Abraham and Moses, and one or two cited passages from the prophets (notably, Amos). Most explained that the choice of Israel should not be seen as only for the benefit of the Jews, but for the benefit of all nations. Some explained that the choice was reciprocal: G-d choosing Israel and Israel choosing G-d. There was some useful discussion of the concept of a 'royal priesthood', and what it means to be a 'holy' nation.

2b 'The Jews could never have survived without the special love of G-d.' Discuss.

Most agreed with the statement in (b), often arguing e.g. that the Jews would never have escaped Egyptian slavery without the Divine intervention. Some argued that other nations have survived without the special love of G-d, and there is no reason to suppose that this could not be true of Israel.

3a Explain the laws of kashrut in relation to money.

This was the least popular question. The majority of candidates explained the concept of kashrut and 'fitness' in general before moving on to consider the specific relationship with money, including e.g. laws concerning charitable giving, the interest payable on loans, inaccurate or faulty weights and measures, advertising, business transactions, and immoral occupations. Surprisingly, few candidates were able to quote directly from the Torah, although reference was made to the teaching of Rabbinic authorities (notably, Maimonides). Some candidates merely listed points they had learned in class. One or two ignored the question set and wrote about kashrut in general.

3b 'Kashrut takes the idea of holiness to unnecessary extremes.' Discuss.

The majority opinion was against the statement in (b), candidates arguing e.g. that through the observance of kashrut one can serve G-d and not merely satisfy one's craving. Others argued e.g. that the observance of kashrut does not necessarily show true love for G-d.

4a Explain the origins of the Torah and the Talmud.

A popular question but answers were often disappointing. The question asked for the origins of the Torah and Talmud; however, a significant number of candidates focused on content and use. Only a minority demonstrated any real depth of knowledge and understanding as to how the Talmud came into existence, and the important centres of learning and the scholars at work in them. Several candidates were able to explain both traditional and progressive approaches to the origin of the Torah.

4b 'The Torah and Talmud are essential for Jewish life today.' Discuss.

Answers to (b) were varied. Some candidates argued, for example, that both Torah and Talmud are essential for Jewish life today, and that one is insufficient without the other. Others argued for example that tradition has replaced some of the reliance on the scriptures.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Religious Studies H172 H572
June 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
G571	Raw	70	49	42	36	30	24	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G572	Raw	70	47	40	33	27	21	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G573	Raw	70	53	45	38	31	24	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G574	Raw	70	59	51	43	36	29	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G575	Raw	70	52	44	36	28	20	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G576	Raw	70	49	42	35	28	21	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G577	Raw	70	49	42	35	28	21	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G578	Raw	70	59	52	45	39	33	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G579	Raw	70	52	44	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0

Specification Aggregation Results

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

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

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H172	21.1	41.8	62.9	80.2	91.5	100	9677

9677 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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