

Religious Studies

Advanced GCE A2 H572

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H172

Report on the Units

June 2010

HX72/R/10

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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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Chief Examiner's Report

This was the first time that all the new A2 units were examined and examiners were generally very pleased with the quality of many of the scripts.

However, there are a number of common concerns across all units (AS and A2) which centres and candidates might wish to note.

- Handwriting this year was noticeably worse than in previous years. In a few cases scripts could not be read and in many cases examiners found it extremely difficult to assess the general content of some passages.
- Quality of English matters. The levels of response descriptors specifically refer to the quality of written English; failure to write good clear sentences and to structure paragraphs often hinders candidates significantly. In some cases, clearly able candidates are throwing away marks simply because they have not taken the time to write clearly.
- Using standard text books, specifically written for the specification, is a good starting point for A Level preparation but these will not necessarily prove adequate for the 'stretch and challenge' component, especially at A2. In any case, candidates should be using more than one book per unit so that they can offer their own considered views.

Centres are reminded that there are no areas of the unit specification content which may not be examined; it is just as unwise to assume that a topic will appear in a paper or that some 'obscure' areas will not be assessed.

G571 Philosophy of Religion

General comments

Many candidates took the opportunities presented in this paper and produced some valuable philosophical thought. A significant number, however, produced pedestrian, and often inaccurate, lists of theories, even when discussion of ideas was required by the question. It cannot be stressed too often that examiners – as required by the nature of the subject – expect candidates to demonstrate that they have considered and reflected on ideas and not merely learned them. To put it another way, more information does not equate to a demonstration of deeper understanding.

Written communication is becoming more of an issue each year. Increasingly, candidates are limiting themselves by poor handwriting; some candidates received no credit as examiners were unable to decipher their scripts. Poor English was also an issue for some candidates. For instance, some candidates might note that there is no verb 'to of'.

There are still candidates who attempt this examination with insecure knowledge of basic philosophical concepts and terminology. Many remain unaware of the correct meaning of terms such as 'logical necessity' (a special problem in question 2b), 'empirical', 'logical', 'refute', 'metaphysical', '*a priori*' or '*a posteriori*'. This subject *presupposes* familiarity with basic philosophical notions and some candidates have paid too little attention to these. Some struggled with the fundamental skill of constructing arguments, especially in part b) of questions. A *statement* of a viewpoint is not an *argument*, and argument by assertion is inappropriate in philosophical writing. Many candidates would benefit from thinking through the implications of the descriptors in the published levels of response used for marking – these are invaluable for explaining precisely those abilities rewarded by examiners.

Comments on individual questions

1(a) This was a very popular question which, on the whole, was attempted competently. Most candidates were able to give a good account of the Prime Mover from Aristotle and give some appropriate comparisons with the Judeo-Christian God as a creator. The best answers concentrated on the key attributes of the Prime Mover and took examples from Genesis 1, Genesis 2 or Job to illustrate similarities or differences between the two concepts. Transcendence and immanence were discussed with particular effect; whereas the notion of Aristotle's shared Greek assumption of the pre-existing nature of matter in a chaotic state verses the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* was rarely drawn. Common mistakes were to focus on all three of the Thomistic 'Ways' for the Prime Mover and Paley (design *qua* purpose) for God as a craftsman. This led to a poor or general topic approach to the question.

A significant number of candidates wrongly conflated Prime Mover with First Cause, which is inappropriate here. It was clear that a minority of candidates had no understanding of the term 'craftsman' in its ordinary English usage and so were unable to apply the concept to God.

- 1(b)** Responses covered a range of possible approaches. Some of the best addressed the question by considering the notion of explanation, considering, for example, the claim that philosophers ask why something happens and not merely how it does.

Candidates recognised that this question could be answered in a variety of different ways, the most common method was to contrast philosophical approaches e.g. from Aquinas and Plato with Scientific ones; many referred to Plato's claim that *a priori* knowledge was superior to *a posteriori* and argued that scientists would challenge this. To do this, many good arguments employed Plato's claim that only the philosopher can understand the true nature of reality with challenges from Aristotle or a scientific world view approach.

The traditional arguments for the existence of God were also used to good effect. This view was countered by more scientific theories or discussion of methods of enquiry in philosophy as compared to science. Some, for example, used the example of the Big Bang Theory, arguing that it is supported by empirical evidence and contrasted it with religious explanations of creation.

Poorer responses tended to lose focus on the question as they tried to bring in as much material as they could. More adept responses were able to give a clearer overview of their assessment and produce explicit arguments. Unfortunately, some candidates took the opportunity to write their pre-prepared accounts of Plato's cave, sometimes writing it out all over again. Many had little understanding of what a 'philosopher' might be, using the term as a synonym for 'fundamentalist', 'creationist', or 'religious believer'.

- 2(a)** This was the most popular question and was generally well answered. Candidates were adept at outlining Anselm's first ontological argument making clear the logical process that Anselm employed in his argument. Better responses were able to give helpful examples to expand and explain the logic of the argument; while poorer responses struggled to explain the notion of existence in the mind and reality being better than simply existing in the mind. This was explained by some candidates but they failed to demonstrate that the definition of 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' would necessarily mean that God must exist in the mind as well as in reality. The poorest responses could only give Anselm's definition and assert that because God is perfect He must exist. These responses made no distinction between Descartes and Anselm.

The second formulation of Anselm's argument was either very badly dealt with or dealt with well. Some of the good answers struggled to make explicit how Anselm argued that God is such that He cannot not exist. The better good answers were able to demonstrate that a being that can be thought not to exist is incompatible with the definition of TFWNGCBC and so God must be a being that cannot be thought not to exist by definition in order to avoid a logical contradiction. Very good or excellent examples were able to draw together all the best examples of the above with some useful insights into the nature of the argument such as the notion of *reductio ad absurdum*. Anselm's response to Gaunilo's 'excellent lost Island' criticism was widely dealt with; despite some confusion in places where some claimed that the second formulation was Anselm's response. The weakest responses were general discussions of the ontological argument.

A significant number of responses attributed to philosophers some strange examples, including Anselm on the National Lottery and Kant's inexplicable fascination with unicorns and computers.

2(b) This was, in general, the most poorly done question on the paper, as few candidates understood the concept of 'logical necessity'. Good responses were able to give a straightforward assessment of Descartes, Anselm, Kant, Gaunilo and the like throughout their argument. Poor answers tried to argue that it is logically necessary that God exists because the universe exists or there is some evidence of design that necessarily entails the existence of God. They missed the point entirely and failed to create a suitable argument. Those who attempted to answer the question on an ontological tack did well. Logical necessity is the basic philosophical concept which underlies all ontological arguments and it was disappointing that this was not grasped.

3(a) This was the least popular question. A good number of candidates who chose to write on this topic generally knew the material very well and were able to illustrate Behe's theory clearly and concisely. Some tried to talk about the complexity of the universe in general but had no real understanding of the notion of Irreducible Complexity, ignoring the key adjective and choosing to answer from their knowledge of the appearance of complexity; many wrote from the point of view of intelligent or complex design, using Aquinas, Mill and others. Many who did respond showed no sign of learning about Irreducible Complexity as it is specified

Some responses appeared to suggest the following: 'have a go as I'm not sure about the others and I need to write two essays'. These candidates tended to produce very weak responses as they believed they knew something about the intelligent design argument. They trotted out pre-Darwinian arguments that belonged in the Teleological section of the specification. This gave the examiners almost no material which they could credit.

Given the nature of these responses there were very few average marks given in this question. Those who had revised irreducible complexity gained very high marks and those who were guessing what it might mean gained no marks at all.

3(b) Those who had revised this question were able to produce excellent responses demonstrating an impressive grasp of the notion of Intelligent Design. Materials in the responses were drawn from a variety of sources across the AS course. For example, topics included the problem of evil, Aquinas and Paley, the Anthropic principle, Dawkins and Darwin. There were some successful answers that challenged Behe and Dembski's ideas.

Less focused candidates seemed to have assumed that the question was simply about evidence of design. Some argued simply by generalised assertion, perhaps by giving an account of Hume, while others considered evidence of indifferent or poor design.

4(a) Most candidates were aware of Freud's views, though a substantial minority simply wrote about possible sources of moral awareness. Better answers demonstrated an understanding that the question demanded *explanation* and not simply description of Freud's theories. Some candidates demonstrated useful knowledge of Freud's theories about the Oedipus complex and the Primal Horde in addition to more familiar points about the id, ego and superego.

Assertions of the superego as conscience occupied the fewer full explanations of Freud's explanation of ego development. Some general examples of how parental figures or society cause individuals to develop their own perspective were used with reasonable effect. Many candidates struggled to spell 'id' correctly, thinking of it as 'ID' or 'I.D.'

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- 4(b)** This question allowed for a variety of responses because of its open nature and some candidates were able to make good advantage of this. The main focus was on efforts to demonstrate alternative sources of morality; some did this through challenging Kant's moral argument conclusions or logical structure. Thinkers such as Owen, Aquinas, Fromm and Dawkins were all used to good effect.

Some responses assumed that Christianity necessarily assumes that God is the only explanation (which is not the case) but most were able to construct credible arguments based on social or psychological factors.

G572 Religious Ethics

General comments

Overall, the performance of the candidates was good but it varied according to the questions answered. Candidates were better able to deal with questions which focused on specific theories rather than questions which asked them to apply theories to practical ethical issues.

Candidates must learn how to apply a range of ethical theories to practical ethical issues. Those candidates (even able ones) who do not know how to do so cannot therefore access the higher marks.

Most candidates showed that they understood the general topic areas but were not always so successful in the specifics of the question.

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

Comments on individual questions

1 (a) This was one of the most popular questions. Whilst some candidates simply referred to differences at the most basic level, more able candidates were able to demonstrate these with reference to ethical theories.

However, some candidates struggled to get above band 2 as they did not answer the question directly, but simply wrote half their answer on relativism and half on absolutism, referring to the differences in a final sentence.

The best candidates were able to articulate clearly what constituted absolute and relative morality, using good examples and focusing on the key word in the question: differences. At the higher end candidates were making reference to divergence and dependence, as well as illustrating the differences through exemplars and by specific reference to the structure of the theories they used as exemplars.

1(b) This question elicited some very good discussions of what was meant by being good, and the different approaches to goodness.

Many candidates, however, simply gave pre-prepared lists of strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches, but never really got to grips with what the question was asking.

Higher level candidates did address the question directly, some even referring to metaethics in their answers.

2(a) This was also a very popular question and generally answered well. Higher level responses linked Mill to Bentham and illustrated the strengths of his system by contrasting it with that of Bentham; some even showing Mill's strengths by comparing him to Singer's approach.

There were, on the other hand, several candidates who simply referred to Mill as a Rule Utilitarian and wrote their responses on Rule Utilitarianism rather than Mill's concept.

The majority were able to demonstrate an understanding of higher and lower pleasures, and even some considered Mill's ideas of breaking rules. Many also referred to the general strengths of all Utilitarian approaches and rightly stated that Mill shared these.

- 2(b)** Generally, this question was well answered. Candidates were able to highlight the mistreatment of minorities, the inability to accurately predict the future, and the possibility of using Utilitarianism to justify anything.

Many candidates compared Utilitarianism with Kantian ethics or Natural Law, finding these theories more likely to lead to good moral decisions and less easy to manipulate.

Some excellent answers looked at the difference between a wrong moral decision, which might have either a good or a bad outcome, and a wrong moral act.

- 3(a)** This was a less popular choice. While most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a basic understanding of Kantian ethics, fewer were able to apply the system effectively. Some candidates did not understand right to a child and wrote about the rights **of** a child, including abortion, upbringing, education etc.

Most answers referred to duty and were able to apply the Categorical Imperative to IVF and surrogacy. Many answers, however, diversified into Natural Law and religious ethics, some considering that Kant had the precept to reproduce.

A very small number of candidates were able to consider that universal laws could be worded carefully to get the answer one wanted. Some recognised the definition of a person that Kant operated with and how that might affect a decision.

In general there was a good attempt to answer this applied ethics question.

- 3(b)** In many cases this section was answered better than part a), but many candidates relied on general answers about who is fit to be a parent and not really getting to grips with the varying responses of the ethical theories as well as religious approaches.

Many good responses made use of specific cases, Biblical teaching and good understanding of Natural Law.

- 4(a)** This was the least popular question, and responses tended to be very general and basic. Too many candidates relied on general comments like 'do not kill' and 'love your neighbour', so many responses were more GCSE style than AS level.

Good responses were able to make se of contrasting Biblical teachings on war and peace, the stance taken by religious pacifists, and the ideas of specific scholars.

There were also some good explanations of Just War, but some simply thought it enough to give a basic statement of Just War. Some candidates also seemed to consider that all Roman Catholics were pacifists.

Responses from a Jewish perspective were in general very good.

Report on the Units taken in June 2010

4(b) This was often answered better than part a), probably because a lot of general arguments can be used.

Those candidates who used precise arguments such as Sanctity of Life generally did better, and candidates who failed to mention Just War in part a) used it effectively in answering this question.

G573 Jewish Scriptures

General comments

The least popular question in many centres was question 4. The other topics were virtually equally popular.

Most candidates addressed the questions according to the two assessment objectives but there are still some candidates who seem to think that they have to debate the a) parts of the questions. Unfortunately, some candidates thought the a) and b) parts were options despite the disparity in the marks available. Usually they left out the b) part. 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 or regurgitated a pre-prepared essay vaguely linked with the question. There were, however, some excellent responses which quoted the set texts appropriately, made reference to issues of date, authorship, purpose and historicity.

Comments on individual questions

- 1(a)** In this examination, some story telling is inevitable and worthy of credit, especially when containing details which reflect knowledge and understanding of the set texts. Many candidates, however, were keen to tell the Noah story through to the rainbow in detail but virtually ignored the account of the actual covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 though stressing the promise of a Davidic dynasty. Hardly anybody mentioned Nathan the prophet. Some candidates dealt with Noah then David and handled the differences at the end. Others made the differences the focus from the start. The seven Noachide laws were creditworthy but not essential for a full response because they are not itemised in the set text (Genesis 8:20-9:29). The main difference often identified was that Noah's covenant was with the whole of humanity like that of Adam but David's was in the context of Judaism. The Messiah was often identified as the sign of the Davidic covenant and, because the Messianic Age is still in the future whereas the rainbow has been here since the time of Noah, this was considered by some candidates to be a major difference.
- 1(b)** Some candidates agreed with the statement and did a reprise of part a). Others based their discussion on the fact that both were covenants with God and, as such, they must have things in common. For example, G-d seems to take the initiative in covenantal relationships and chooses men of faith. Cue for more storytelling as candidates considered the characteristics common to Noah and David as men of faith.

There were some quite mature discussions on the interdependence of all the covenants in the Jewish Scriptures and on G-d's master plan which embraces the whole progression of the covenants as candidates tried to balance the significant similarities and differences.

- 2(a)** Candidates usually gave an account of the giving of the Decalogue and the role of Moses as the mediator between G-d and the newly formed nation. Most included some sort of summary of the Ten Commandments with explanatory comments on significant points. Some went on to explain about the Torah and the Oral Torah and the commitment voiced by the Jewish nation that 'we will listen' and 'we will do'. Some candidates were mindful of the reference to 19-24 in the question and explained about the additional laws which follow in 'the book of the covenant'. They seemed to have studied the actual set chapters. Some candidates then went on to explain that though all the Law is important, the Decalogue contains apodictic laws as opposed to casuistic laws which apply the main principles to particular situations.
- 2(b)** Discussions varied according to which 'main features' of the Mosaic covenant had been covered in answer to the previous part of the question. Most candidates acknowledged the practical function of the Sinai covenant for the Israelite community and the ongoing value of the Torah for Jews to the present day. Many centres referred to the fact that the Decalogue is reflected in many law codes of other nations and is used by Christianity. Some argued that the universal laws really echo the Noachide Law which was important too. Abraham's covenants were serious contenders for most important in some discussions because that is where the Jewish special relationship began. Other discussions considered the way in which the covenant with Moses not only builds on and develops from previous covenants, particularly the covenant with Abraham, but also remains a pivotal point of reference for future covenants (e.g. the covenant with Jeremiah). Nevertheless, most candidates concluded that all the covenants were part of G-d's plan and therefore ultimately all were important and none were the most important.
- 3(a)** There was a tendency to repeat rehearsed answers but candidates mostly tried to fit their essays to the question. Most echoed the specification by explaining that Jonah learnt from his experiences that he was unable to hide from G-d or to resist G-d's wishes and Job learnt to accept G-d's will. Some centres were comfortable with concepts such as omnipotence, justice and mercy, omnipresence and universalism. The specification places both books under the theme of G-d and suffering so some candidates concentrated on what Jonah and Job each learned about suffering. Candidates usually wrote that in Jonah's case he realised he brought it on himself and Job had to learn to accept that the will of G-d is beyond human comprehension.
- 3(b)** Some candidates attempted a definition of wisdom literature or gave a summary of the types of literature found in the Jewish Scriptures. The specification includes: myth, history, prophecy, poetry, law, wisdom (hohma), liturgy; with their origins and purpose. Though Jonah is among the prophetic books and Job in the Ketuvim (Writings) in the Jewish Scriptures, there are elements of other types of literature present in the texts. Some candidates seemed to be unaware of the types of literature and simply considered whether there was wisdom in the texts. Others explained that Wisdom literature explores universal questions about spirituality and the human dilemma and discussed the themes of the books in deciding the extent to which either book might be classified as wisdom. Some responses pointed out that all the books in the Jewish Scriptures tend to have a theological dimension in that the existence of G-d is taken for granted. Anticipating A2 texts they commented that this is the beginning of wisdom.

- 4(a)** Elijah is a relatively new topic in this specification but there were some good essays and it was clear that the candidates had enjoyed their studies and knew the text. Most began by identifying Elijah as a ninth century BCE prophet who lived in Israel in the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. The set chapters are I Kings 18,19 and 21. The interpretation put on the word 'miraculous' by the candidates was sometimes extremely colloquial. Some thought it was miraculous that a King of Israel would let his wife have so much power. The account of the contest on Mount Carmel with the fire and the rain was prominent in most essays and told in great detail. The importance was usually explained as a demonstration of G-d's power over natural phenomena that proved to be greater than that of the Canaanite fertility Baalim and Ashtaroth and particularly greater than Jezebel's Phoenician Baal, Melkart. Elijah running before the chariot in prophetic ecstasy was considered miraculous by some and others wrote that it was a miracle that, after all that, Elijah lost confidence and ran away to Horeb (Sinai). The theophany on Horeb was used by some candidates but they did not always tie it very well to the question. Some simply explained that this time it was not in the wind, earthquake or fire but in 'a still, thin sound' that G-d communicated with Elijah. A number of responses ended with the fact that Ahab repented, which was considered extremely miraculous.
- 4(b)** Most discussions were about stopping and starting rain, making fire fall on wet stones and the extent to which it is difficult to accept that some of the incidents in the stories actually happened. Very few candidates tried to explore the nature and purpose of the stories of Elijah as types of literature but most responses usually concluded that the significance lies in the meaning of the stories which is that G-d is more powerful than pagan idols. As usual in questions about historicity, some candidates homed in on the phrase 'lose all significance' and argued that nothing could be considered insignificant in sacred literature. Such discussions tended to include the idea that the long history of Judaism provides enough validation for the faith without consideration of the historicity of specific stories.

G574 New Testament

General Comments

Candidate performance covered a wide ability range. There were some excellent, thoughtful answers which demonstrated knowledge of the set text and showed understanding of a variety of meanings and interpretations in part a) and the skill of arguing holistically, with effective use of evidence, for part b) of questions. However, there were also candidates who achieved only the basic level for their attempt.

There was an indication that the majority of Centres are making good use of available resources. Many candidates' answers showed a refreshing awareness of modern, up to date views of the background to First Century Palestine and the recent works on the historical Jesus.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1(a)** This was a popular question, although not always answered well by candidates. Some candidates did not appear to know the details of Mark 11:14-19 and answered in fairly general terms, making only vague references to the actual event. Loss of focus on the demonstration in the Temple was a common trait. There were some detailed answers on the placing of The Cleansing of the Temple, as a Markan sandwich, between the cursing and the withering of the fig tree and whilst this has a commendable relevance it was puzzling to see only a brief or sketchy reference to the Temple incident itself. However, there were also some very good and excellent answers, showing engagement with the material and examining, in detail, the various theories on the significance of Jesus' demonstration in the Temple.
- 1(b)** Most candidates considered the different points of view on the possible reasons for Jesus' arrest and the best answers expanded their arguments to also consider the inevitability of the fulfilment of God's plan. Some weaker responses showed confusion as to whether, according to Mark, it was the Jewish or Roman authorities who arrested Jesus and consequently there was some muddled reasoning as to the cause of his arrest. This might have been due to some candidates attempting, but failing, to get to grip with views as to whether the arrest did take place, as recorded in Mark.
- 2(a)** Some candidates did not show enough knowledge of the events of the Jewish and Roman trials and many answers were disorganised and characterised by random explanations and afterthoughts, without any commentary about what actually happened in the trials. Better answers linked the events with relevant commentary and used suitable scholarship in, for example, examining views on the real nature of Pilate.
- 2(b)** Candidates appeared to find this an interesting question and there were some very good answers. However, in some answers, views on Mark's harsh presentation of the Jews were enthusiastically asserted but not fully justified and there was often a lack of balance in proposing counter arguments.

- 3(a)** The performance on this question was generally disappointing. This was often the weaker of two answers for some candidates. Only a few were able to relate the account accurately or attempt a commentary. Some answers were just a general topic discussion about the resurrection with some description of Jesus' appearance to the disciples in the verses following the prescribed text on Emmaus. A few, excellent answers did maintain a focus on the road to Emmaus as a recognition story with a Eucharistic reference, containing key Lukan ideas about the resurrection.
- 3(b)** There were some satisfactory and good answers to this question and most candidates attempted to analyse different viewpoints. However, in some answers there appeared to be a linguistic confusion surrounding the words 'faith' and 'fact' and some candidates argued in an increasingly circular fashion. The best answers offered straightforward arguments as to whether or not Luke's resurrection stories might succeed in inspiring faith.
- 4(a)** This was a very popular question and the performance was very pleasing. The topic was tackled with enthusiasm by a large number of candidates. It was extremely well done with a good selection of information and engagement with the material. Even the weaker responses were able to demonstrate a clear, if not very detailed, understanding of the relationship between Q and the Synoptics. The best candidates showed a good understanding of the history of Biblical scholarship on this topic and its appeal for scholars today.
- 4(b)** The majority of candidates were able to provide a complementary evaluation to their answer in part a) and there was some very good and excellent analysis of the value of Source Criticism.

Some candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers which revisited areas explained in part a) before reaching an evaluative conclusion and lost the focus of their argument. However, some of the answers to this and other part b) questions demonstrated the ability to use a range of evidence to support arguments.

G575 Developments in Christian Theology

General comments

There were many excellent answers indicating some sophisticated and original understanding of complex issues well beyond AS standard. There were very few poor scripts although there were more candidates than usual who were unable to find two questions to demonstrate their knowledge.

Handwriting this year was decidedly worse than in previous years. Examiners often struggled to decipher what was being said; this cannot be to the advantage of the candidate. Candidates are again reminded that a few moments spent thinking about the exact demands of the question pays dividends. Those who wrote at length on matters not directly related to the essay question cannot expect to gain high marks.

Too many candidates merely repeated information from part a) in their part b) answers. However, there were also a significant minority of candidates who having not written so well on part a) then proceeded to think imaginatively and critically in part b) and earned high marks. Candidates were reminded that part b) questions must be in some form of discussion which develops a particular idea.

Comments on individual questions

1(a) This was a very popular question and there were many good scripts. The better candidates talked in detail about Calvin's ideas of God as creator and redeemer and showed how they were linked. Candidates tended to know more about God as redeemer than can God as creator – many forgot to consider the creation as a mirror *and* as a theatre of God's activity. Candidates are warned that use of Barth when answering on Calvin in part a) questions can be misleading; Barth is best reserved to evaluating Calvin.

Weaker responses tended to focus on general ideas of God as creator. A number of candidates saw the question as a trigger to write about Aquinas and creation or general religious experience.

1(b) A few excellent candidates really understood the difference between *knowledge* of God and *proof* for God's existence. There were some good discussions about the limits and usefulness of various design arguments (notably Paley and Aquinas) but those who understood the crucial issue of knowing God (as raised in the Barth-Brunner debate) were able to see natural theology's tendency towards deism rather than knowledge as salvation.

There were some good discussions of the problems of evil and the natural world and what this indicates about the nature of God. Although potentially interesting, those who discussed the problem of creation in the light of modern science did little more than raise issues of belief rather the limits or deficiencies of natural theology.

Some struggled with the non-sequitur that as there are atheists in the world then the question must be true.

- 2(a)** This was not a popular question and was generally poorly done. Some confused inspiration with being inspiring and explained that Christians look up passages in the Bible during moments of need. Few were able to discern the difference between inspiration and authority.

Many responses tended to be a simple 'romp' through fundamentalists, liberals and conservatives/traditionalists but with few examples from the Bible.

However, the better candidates were able to flesh out the views with some detail, for example: Bultmann and demythologising; fundamentalism and Genesis; Origen and allegory; Barth and Scripture as witness.

- 2(b)** Very few candidates chose to tackle what the term 'correct' means although some got close to it by illustrating the contemporary debate about the Bible and homosexuality. Too many candidates threw the terms eisegesis and exegesis around without really being clear how they were using them. In the same way the word 'hermeneutics' was often confusingly used as a synonym for 'interpretation'.

Some mentioned Schleiermacher and Ricoeur but only better candidates were able to draw out their ideas and apply them appropriately.

Those who kept their answers simple perhaps by discussing the problem of the relationship of Old and New Testaments often did well.

- 3(a)** Most candidates were able to explain what praxis meant and were able to distinguish it from orthodoxy often by referring back to the historical origins at Medellin and Puebla (although there was no necessity to do so).

Some went on to describe Marx's influence on liberation theology and how praxis is more than merely action. Those who wrote detailed answers on the three mediations and first/second act praxis gained high marks as did those who were able to explain the relationship between praxis and base communities. Good candidates were able to talk about any of these key points in detail.

- 3(b)** A significant minority of candidates repeated their discussion on praxis from part a). But there were many who really did try and engage with the question and to consider what belief means and its relationship to action or 'works'. Some were aware of New Testament and Reformation debate of justification of faith/works. However, even without this knowledge many suggested that religion is about belief and trust in God – actions or works are secondary. Some candidates argued ably for this position.

The majority considered action to be the superior to belief and many referred to the Bible and in particular the Parable of the Sheep and Goats to support the liberation theologians insistence that performance of justice must precede everything else.

- 4(a)** There were wide-ranging answers to this question; successful candidates were those who were able to connect key Marxist ideas with corresponding ideas in liberation theology.

The most successful answers highlighted Marx's theory and showed how liberation theology picked up and used Marx's ideas such as: alienation, false consciousness, capitalism and exploitation and related these to: the three mediations, base communities, biblical themes of reversal/judgement, critique of the Catholic church, the poor as the underside of history.

Report on the Units taken in June 2010

Many talked at length about the atheist roots of Marx's thought which was not entirely relevant in this question. Weaker candidates tended to write exclusively about Marx or concentrated on the theologians use of praxis without drawing out the Marxist links.

- 4(b)** Many candidates were able to discuss the problems of using an explicitly atheistic ideology in a Christian context. Some suggested that all that Marx calls for in terms of social reform can be found in the Bible (although very few referred to the Old Testament prophets in this context) and which avoids the violence of Marxist revolution.

Better candidates challenged the relevance of Marx post-the fall of communism and referred to Ratzinger's warnings about the reductiveness of Marxism especially in terms of personal sin and holiness. A few supported Kee's argument but realised that the result would destroy the relationship between Catholicism and liberation theology.

Weaker candidates tended to repeat what they had said about Marx from part a.

G576 Buddhism

General comments

In some cases there was clear evidence that centres were preparing candidates well for the examination. The best answers demonstrated awareness of a range of scholars and good understanding of the material studied. They showed an ability to interact with the material and use it to address the specific question asked.

Weaker candidates showed less understanding of the material, and tended to adopt a scattergun approach to the topic they were addressing, by telling us everything they knew about that topic.

This year, responses to part b) questions tended to be of a higher standard than responses to part a) questions. Candidates had generally tried to balance and justify their arguments in part b) and often showed a real ability to think for themselves.

Part a) questions, however, were often focused on a general topic rather than the specific question, and tended to be descriptive rather than explanatory, often revealing a shortfall of knowledge. Candidates need to spend more time revising the specific material in the specification so that their knowledge and understanding is of as high a standard as their ability to form an argument.

Many answers were longer than normal, often 10-12 pages with the longest being 17 pages. In some cases the extra length hindered rather than aided candidates, as they were unable to demonstrate 'selection of relevant material'. In some cases it appeared that candidates had finished an answer, felt it was too short, and added supplementary information to lengthen it which was only vaguely related to the topic. Candidates should be reminded that they are judged on how well they answer the question set, not how much they can tell us about everything they know.

There were a few rubric errors this year, primarily candidates who only completed one question. There were also a number of candidates who answered their first question at length and then wrote only one or two paragraphs for their second question. Centres may wish to emphasise the importance of time management in an examination to maximise the marks gained.

A number of candidates wrote notes to the examiners stating that the wrong question had been set and they would have done better with different questions (often the Eightfold Path or Four Noble Truths). Centres may wish to remind candidates that questions will be asked on the whole range of the specification content, and they must prepare adequately for all topic areas.

Comments on individual questions

1(a) This was a popular question. Unfortunately, most candidates did not focus on the range of religious practices present in India at the time of the Buddha.

Some candidates described the life of the Buddha and the four sights, whilst some wrote about King Asoka.

The majority of candidates focused on the Aryan invasion of North India and then described the caste system in excruciating detail. Whilst some of these candidates then named other religious movements in most cases naming them was all they did.

Where candidates did try to explain Hindu practices they generally described contemporary Hindu beliefs and practices, showing limited awareness of the Brahmanism found at the time of the Buddha.

The best responses explained the key beliefs and practices of Brahmanism, various Shramana movements and the folk traditions in appropriate levels of detail.

- 1(b)** Weaker responses tended to give reasons why the Buddha rejected a variety of religious traditions (including the shramana movements) rather than focusing on Hinduism.

However, in general candidates answered this question well. Most were able to explore concepts the Buddha had rejected (dharma as duty, the caste system and worship of God) and accepted or redefined (rebirth/rebecoming, karma and samsara), before reaching a justified conclusion. Interestingly, candidates who had answered part a poorly often showed a better knowledge of the religious background in India in part b), and if they had incorporated this material in part a) would have gained higher marks.

- 2(a)** This was the least popular question of the paper. Most candidates offered general descriptions of the life of a bhikkhu (vinaya rules, alms round, shaved head, few possessions) without really addressing the nuances of the differing practices of forest and village dwelling bhikkhus. Even these responses showed limited understanding of the practices of bhikkhus. A few candidates mentioned that forest dwelling bhikkhus did not do an alms round, but little specific information seemed to be known.

It was clear in some responses that candidates saw 'forest dwelling and village dwelling bhikkhus' as one group, rather than two distinct groups, and this obviously hindered their answers.

A few responses showed clear understanding of the differing focus of forest dwelling bhikkhus from those living within villages, and were able to give specific examples of the practices of each, including reference to pirit ceremonies, funeral services and teaching by the village dwelling bhikkhus.

- 2(b)** Again, part b) was generally answered better than part a). Most candidates were able to explore whether a life of solitude in the forest aided a bhikkhu more effectively than the merit-making opportunities in village life, or the extra strength shown in ignoring distractions.

Some candidates formulated clear arguments showing that nibbana was more easily achieved as a forest dwelling bhikkhu than as a member of the lay community, and thus achieved well in part b) despite doing poorly in part a).

- 3(a)** This was a fairly popular question, however many candidates appeared to view it as a 'explain the difference between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism' rather than focusing on the arhat and bodhisattva paths. As a result many answers explored the Theravada and Mahayana views of the Buddha, in some cases including the trikaya doctrine, the origins of the Mahayana tradition and the views of both schools on nibbana.

Where candidates did attempt to explore the paths they generally had a better understanding of the arhat path than the bodhisattva path. A significant number of candidates appeared to think that the term 'bodhicitta' referred to a specific person named bodhicitta who asks Buddhists to join the bodhisattva path.

The best answers were able to explore which stages or perfections in the bodhisattva path were similar or different to parts of the eightfold path.

3(b) Again this was generally answered better than part a).

There were a minority of candidates who appeared to believe that arhats died as soon as they gained nibbana and were therefore unable to help anyone else once they achieved their goal.

Most candidates were able to argue that arhats did help others in the period between their enlightenment and their death, and that the concept of anatta made the notion of an arhat being selfish illogical. They then focused on the altruistic aim of the bodhisattva, before reaching a justified conclusion.

4(a) This was the most popular question on the paper, eliciting a variety of responses from the candidates.

Some candidates did little to explore the importance of the three marks, instead describing each mark with varying degrees of detail and accuracy. At the lower end some candidates were unclear about which term referred to which concept.

Most candidates described each term and then added a concluding paragraph explaining their importance.

The best answers explored the importance of each term as they wrote about it, for example referring to the importance of dukkha as a motivation for seeking an answer and thus beginning to follow a Buddhist path. They often referred to other Buddhist teachings for example exploring how an understanding of anicca was essential in understanding tanha and thus breaking the cycle of dependent origination.

Some candidates seemed to want to answer the question 'Which of the three marks of existence is the most important?'. When they included relevant information about the importance of the marks this was credited. Centres may wish to remind candidates of the assessment objectives of part a and b to enable them to use their material more effectively.

4(b) In general this question was well answered. There were a few candidates who stated that they were spelt differently, or that the Buddha taught them as two things so they must be different without supporting their statements. These were however in the minority.

Most candidates were able to explore the differences and similarities between the two concepts to some extent. Many candidates repeated information from part a rather than using it as a springboard to explore the nuances of the concepts, again suggesting a need to be more aware of the assessment objectives for each part.

G577 Hinduism

General comments

In some cases there was clear evidence that centres were preparing candidates well for the examination. The best answers demonstrated awareness of a range of scholars and good understanding of the material studied. Candidates showed an ability to interact with the material and use it to address the specific question asked.

Weaker candidates showed less understanding of the material and tended to adopt a scattergun approach to the topic they were addressing, by telling the examiner everything they knew about that topic. This often meant that while some material was relevant to the question asked, the candidate was not able to demonstrate an ability to select relevant material.

The majority of answers, however, were rather descriptive of the main concepts in the question, rather than addressing the specific demands of the question, for example 'the importance of' or 'relationship between'. This gave some examiners the impression that candidates had learnt the mechanics of Hinduism without fully understanding it.

Some candidates felt the need to explain etic and emic approaches to Hindu issues. While this has a place with reference to some questions, not all candidates understood where and when this was required, and appeared to shoe-horn the concepts into their answer regardless of whether it was appropriate to that specific question.

There were very few rubric errors this year.

Comments on individual questions

1(a) Many responses to this question were unfocused. Candidates tended to provide a general description of worship in the mandir, rather than focusing specifically on the importance of the murti. Some described the whole of the puja or arti ceremonies in minute detail. Whilst some description of the washing and dressing of the murti or the way in which the murti is worshipped was appropriate this needed to be supported with an explanation of the reason for these acts which related back to the question. In some cases the only reference to the importance of the murti was a line or two saying that they represented the God.

There were some better responses. They tended to describe what was done to the murti less, but addressed the importance of the murti more directly. They often explored how the murti aided the worshippers interaction with God, most referring to darshan, and made specific reference to the bhakti path within Hinduism.

1(b) The responses to part b) were often better and more focused than responses to part a). Most candidates were able to form an argument based on the idea that murtis were a representation of God, and that since God was being worshipped rather than the murti idolatry was avoided. Candidates also explored the role of the murti in focusing the mind of the worshipper. Answers tended to be one-sided, however they were often supported by appropriate evidence.

- 2(a)** This was one of the most popular questions on the paper. Most candidates described the concept of atman, then the concept of Brahman, before finishing with a paragraph about their relationship to each other. Candidates were generally better at exploring the concept of Brahman than atman. Many candidates described atman as 'soul' rather than 'Self' and showed little awareness of the specific Hindu understanding of the Self, as opposed to a more generalised Western interpretation of a soul.

Better responses tended to address the relationship between the two throughout the essay rather than addressing it at the end of their work.

- 2(b)** Most candidates were able to formulate an argument in response to this question. Many repeated much of their material from part a) rather than using this as a springboard to develop more evaluative material in part b). A few candidates wrote more AO1 material in this response than they did in part a, and if this material had been incorporated into part a) would have achieved higher marks there. Centres may wish to remind candidates of the assessment objectives for parts a) and b) to enable candidates to use their material more effectively.

- 3 (a)** This was the least popular question on the paper and seemed to be predominately chosen by weaker candidates. Most responses tended to name and describe whichever female deity or deities they could remember with little focus on the importance of either these individual deities or female deities as a whole.

Better responses tended to either explain how the female deities appealed to female worshippers making Hinduism more inclusive, or explore the concept of shakti. Those with a good understanding of the concept of shakti as the energising female power needed to balance the male power within Hinduism tended to give the best responses.

- 3(b)** Candidates tended to interpret power as strength, and this influenced the responses they gave. Most candidates tended to argue that as the Trimurti were responsible for creating and maintaining the universe, and they were male, then male deities were more powerful. Some candidates discussed 'powerful' female deities such as Kali and Durga with the aim of providing a contrast.

As in part a), those candidates with a good understanding of the concept of shakti tended to provide the best responses. They were able to discuss whether male power on its own was in fact purposeless and required female power to energise it, thus perhaps showing female power to be more important. They usually concluded that male and female power were necessarily balanced and created a harmonious whole when combined.

- 4(a)** Most candidates explored the concepts of dharma, karma and moksha before concluding with a paragraph on their relationship. The majority of candidates described dharma in simple terms as duty and showed little understanding of the more complex nature of this term. Moksha was generally better understood, but candidates responses still lacked depth. Too many candidates spent too much time focusing on karma rather than dharma and moksha. Although linking dharma to the development of karma and thus the achievement of moksha was appropriate, candidates tended to drift off topic when exploring karma. There was some evidence of karma being misunderstood and references to the TV programme 'My Name is Earl' as a good demonstration of the concept of karma were unfortunately found.

- 4(b)** The best candidates, as in question 2, tended to focus on the relationship between the two concepts throughout the essay, rather than leaving it to the end of the essay.

G578 Islam

General comments

Some scripts were a pleasure to read and a few candidates gained almost full marks. Their responses demonstrated knowledge and understanding and they could evaluate successfully. The four questions seemed to be of equal parity and differentiated well. Questions 1, 2 and 4 were the most popular. Unfortunately there were some candidates who seemed to misunderstand the rubric and only answered two subsections of the questions rather than two whole questions. There was also a tendency to address the question they wanted to see rather than the question on the paper.

Comments on individual questions

- 1(a)** Competent candidates took the opportunity to quote from Surah 1 about Allah as ‘the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds’ and ‘Master of the Day of Judgement’. They made use of the plea, ‘Show us the straight way...’ to explain the implications for Muslims of believing in Allah as Creator, Judge and Guide. Unfortunately some candidates confused Surah 1 with the other set text, Surah 96, and quoted that instead. A few ignored or misunderstood ‘implications’.
- 1(b)** There were some very thoughtful responses from candidates who demonstrated the ability to interact with the question and to analyse the wording of the set text. Many candidates pointed out that Surah 1 does not contain the Five Pillars which are key ‘religious practices’ in Islam. Some based their discussion on the role of Surah 1 as an introduction. They tended to argue that Surah 1, therefore, would naturally concentrate on belief in Allah as Creator, Judge and Guide whilst the whole of the Qur’an serves the function of showing ‘the straight way’. Others developed points they had made in part a) about the implications for Muslims of the teachings. They tended to make the case that beliefs and practices belong together as true believers in Allah as Creator, Judge and Guide inevitably have to put the teachings into practice so Surah 1 is concerned with both.
- 2(a)** This was very popular and produced a wide range, in terms of quality, of responses. Most candidates began with an introductory description of zakah as one of the Five Pillars and explained that payment of zakah is compulsory; usually two and a half per cent of surplus income paid annually and that it is an act of obedience and worship. Some gave details of how agricultural produce and livestock are calculated and how two and a half per cent on cash includes savings, investments, loans etc. The main weaknesses were in either giving all the rules for payment but ignoring distribution or not linking the rules to Muslim beliefs. Some, however, quoted the Qur’an (e.g. 2:177; 9: 60) which itemises distribution and wrote thoughtfully on Muslim beliefs concerning wealth, stewardship, equality, sharing and the practical application of faith. They explained that zakah is one of the basic economic principles in a Muslim state for social welfare and fair distribution of wealth whilst economy based on interest is forbidden.
- 2(b)** This question was well answered by many candidates. Some used the fact that zakah is said to purify the remainder of the owner’s wealth and argued that the giver is only purified as long as the intention is genuine. Hypocrisy and charity given grudgingly or for the purpose of gaining personal merit were often discussed.

Most pointed out that zakah is meaningful for the recipients regardless of the intention of the giver and some commented that it is doubly helpful in that it frees the poor from jealousy and resentment as well as providing practical help.

- 3(a)** This question was not popular and sometimes very badly handled. 'The religious significance of the Night Journey' is a relatively new topic on the specification. One or two candidates confused the Night Journey with the Night of Power. Competent candidates tended to begin by placing the Night Journey to Jerusalem in the context of the life of Muhammad ﷺ. It was the 10th year of his prophethood which was a year of sorrow because not only had he been abused and mocked by the people of Ta'if but it was also the year that Khadijah and uncle Abu Talib died. Most candidates knew that the journey to Jerusalem was on a winged creature called Buraq. Some gave quite detailed accounts of the ascent Al- Mi'raj to heaven including meeting all the prophets such as Adam, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa and Harun (Aaron). Most responses included the conversation that led to the practice of five times daily prayers This was used by some to address 'religious significance'. Many candidates, however, did not address the 'religious significance' aspect of the question at all.
- 3(b)** The specification now includes the upbringing of Muhammad ﷺ. It also includes Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Pagan influences but these rarely featured in the discussions about 'how far' various factors led to or were reflected in the night journey religious experience. Some candidates did manage to use details from the early life of Muhammad ﷺ to suggest some connection with the night journey mystical experience and most covered the aversion of Muhammad ﷺ to the polytheistic practices in Makkah and the corrupt social practices.
- 4(a)** Many candidates began with an introduction defining a mosque as a masjid, place of prostration, and some explained that Muhammad ﷺ established the first mosque in Madinah. Some then resorted to giving a description of a mosque that they knew or had visited and a few simply drew and labelled a diagram of a mosque. 'Theological significance' eluded many candidates but there were some excellent responses which explained that the design and orientation of the mosque fulfilled the Qur'anic requirements of a clean place facing Makkah for prostration in submission to Allah. A number of candidates also included rooms used for teaching and other needs of the local Muslim community as theologically significant in that Islam is a total way of life for the Ummah.
- 4(b)** Some candidates simply explained the reasons for the absence of statues or pictures. Others were able to discuss the topic well because they saw the focus of the question and suggested alternative 'most significant' features and debated the relative importance before reaching a conclusion. Some candidates made an excellent developed case in support of the stated view on the grounds that Muhammad ﷺ rode into Makkah in 629 C.E. and destroyed the idols and in Islam only Allah is to be worshipped therefore to make an image or picture or any representation would be shirk.

G579 Judaism

General discussion

Overall, the standard of response was quite good and the majority of candidates well prepared for the examination. Most candidates appeared to have had little difficulty in answering two questions in the allocated time. A small number made little attempt with part b) questions although their knowledge and understanding demonstrated in part a) questions was generally sound. On the whole, the quality of written communication was good. The better responses came from those who focused specifically on the question set and whose answers were coherent. Some candidates relied heavily on reproducing material from text books which they did not always fully understand. All questions were attempted, although Question 2 was by far the most popular choice. It was obvious that candidates had been encouraged to debate important issues and many offered a personal conclusion to their discussion.

Comments on individual questions

- 1(a)** Most candidates began their discussion by outlining the historical origins of the Talmud. Some erroneously supposed that the Babylonian Talmud, and some supposed that the Tannaim were expounders of the Gemara. All candidates discussed the importance of the Talmud in clarifying questions of right conduct not explained in detail in the Written Torah, and many were able to give examples from the biblical text. Many discussed the use of the Talmud as a training text in yeshivot, and some discussed its importance in regulating personal religious practise. Some focused on how the Talmud is viewed by modern Judaism and the different authority given to it by different divisions within Judaism.
- 1(b)** In their response to b), most candidates argued eg that the actual law-codes of the Written Torah are so brief that they could never, by themselves, have constituted an entire legal framework by which Jewish society was regulated; therefore, the Bible and Talmud are equally important. Some argued that the whole Tenakh consists of inspired texts and this places the Tenakh at the core of Jewish teaching, whereas the Talmud is simply a product of the rabbinic tradition. Others argued the superior importance of the Tenakh in narrating the history, culture and religious responses of the Jewish people.
- 2(a)** This question elicited some excellent responses. Most candidates focused their discussion on kashrut in relation to food and clothing, and many demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the various theological and socio-historical reasons that have been proposed to explain the laws. The teaching of Maimonides was cited. Some discussed how the laws are viewed by modern Judaism and the different authority given to them by several movements within Judaism.
- 2(b)** In their response to part b), most candidates argued that all of the mitzvot have equal validity, some contending that it is not the place of human beings to question the status of laws decreed by G-d. Others maintained that the Ten Commandments are more significant, arguing that the laws of kashrut have no moral validity other than to remind people of their Jewish origins. Some argued that all of the laws contribute to the sanctification of ordinary life.

- 3(a)** Answers were generally good. Most candidates were aware that, in Judaism, worship embraces all religious activity, including eg obedience to the mitzvot. Many candidates demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the set forms and times of prayer. Some discussed how the liturgy focuses on two main rubrics: the Shema and the Tefillah. Nearly all candidates discussed the requirement of the minyan for public worship, and the sanctity attached to certain objects in the synagogue. When discussing worship in the home, much good discussion centred on how there is no activity which Judaism does not seek to elevate into an act of holiness – numerous examples were given.
- 3(b)** In their response to part b), many candidates argued that spontaneous prayer comes from the heart and allows one to express one's deepest emotions to G-d, whereas prayer in the synagogue is often no more than the repetition of words written by someone else. Some argued the importance of the community's prayer to G-d and that prayer in the synagogue discourages selfish prayer. Others argued that prayer in the synagogue helps those unable to pray spontaneously.
- 4(a)** On the whole, candidates made a good attempt at answering this question. Most included discussion on the ethical dimensions to the nature of G-d, and the moral demands made on the Jewish people to worship one God alone. Some included good discussion of ethical monotheism as a practical faith. Unhappily, a sizeable minority lost the focus of the question and merely described the characteristics of a monotheistic G-d.
- 4(b)** In their response to part b), many candidates argued that belief in ethical monotheism is the essential core of Jewish life in that it sets the boundaries for Jews and guides them in serving G-d and emulating Him. Others argued that, for Jews, acts of kindness are more important than belief in ethical monotheism: that Jews can have right beliefs but they do not necessarily act on those beliefs.

G581 Philosophy of Religion

General discussion

There were many good scripts this year. –However, there were also many obviously able candidates who failed to do themselves justice by not reading the question properly. Examinations at this level are not primarily a test of what candidates know, but rather of how well they can apply their knowledge in a focused response to the question set. Many candidates wrote at enormous length, covering every theory they could remember, but often without demonstrating how these might be remotely relevant. Good responses establish relevance – it is clear to the examiner *why* a particular point has been made. Too many essays read simply as lists, as if learned by rote from power point notes or lists of bullet points. Better responses had clearly *reflected* on issues, rather than simply learning them. In doing so, they were able to construct effective arguments.

There was some concern that some candidates had studied the old rather than the new specification. It was evident that some had failed to acquaint themselves with Boethius' work.

A significant number of candidates handicapped themselves by poor use of English: muddled expression too often points to, and creates, muddled thought. A particular problem for many was inadequate grasp of the grammar of philosophy, with terms such as 'prove' (used as a synonym for 'argue'), 'refute' (used to mean 'deny'), *a priori* (often mistakenly used for 'innate'), *a posteriori*, 'analytic' and 'metaphysical' commonly misunderstood.

Written communication is becoming more of an issue each year. Increasingly candidates are limiting themselves by poor handwriting; some candidates received no credit as examiners were unable to decipher their scripts. Poor English was also an issue for some candidates. For instance some candidates might note that there is no verb 'to of'.

Comments on individual questions

1 This was a popular question, though a disappointingly large number of candidates seemed unaware of Aquinas' notion of the Doctrine of Analogy, using the question as an opportunity to describe Plato's cave or Paley's watch. Others, however, demonstrated good understanding of and acquaintance with Aquinas' writings though some confused analogy of attribution with analogy of proportion. Some candidates set the scene well through a discussion of the *via negativa* and how Aquinas responded to it. Ramsey's models and qualifiers appeared regularly and many candidates made good use of knowledge of other areas of religious language, while making clear comparisons with analogy.

Others made odd points about bull's urine demonstrating the goodness of medicine, which seemed an odd route to take compared with Aquinas clearer example of the urine and the health of the bull.

Too many candidates read this question as 'List every theory you know about religious language' and there were some pedestrian and unfocused responses, based on what appeared at times to be pre-prepared answers. Those who addressed the question specifically were rewarded.

- 2 This was the least popular question, but it attracted some excellent answers from candidates who had studied Boethius carefully. These considered the implications of Boethius' views on God's allegedly timeless knowledge and explored the distinction between simple and conditional necessity, while reflecting on whether Boethius argument led to a God very limited in power.

Candidates were often able to set the scene through a discussion of God's attributes and this was generally done well. For most answers candidates then went on to explore Boethius argument with reference to God's foreknowledge and free will. Although many candidates mentioned that God surveys the whole of time as an eternal present, they failed to explain Boethius' understanding of term eternal as being timeless where the past, present and future are all alike. Due to a lack of knowledge on Boethius, a significant number of candidates then found it difficult to assess whether he was successful in his argument that God rewards and punishes justly. Although candidates understood that Boethius' argument was designed to justify God's actions, they were not always clear as to why or how.

A significant number of candidates read the question simply as 'God rewards and punishes justly', with no reference to Boethius, attracting little credit.

- 3 This was a popular question where most candidates knew something about James and other arguments and some candidates considered thoughtfully such issues as alternative explanations of religious experience and many wrote interesting critiques of other thinkers, such as Swinburne. A few became obsessed with only one type of experience – commonly miracles or near-death (often described as 'outer [sic] body' experiences). Some candidates realised they needed to focus on James and not just give a broad look at religious experience. The weaker responses simply sandwiched in James' four categories and then moved on giving equal or often more weight to other types and views of religious experience. A number of candidates pointed out that James thought religious experiences proved God's existence.

Some weaker responses which did explore James' writings did not cover James in sufficient depth, spending too long in their answers on Kant and Hume, or whoever they had revised. A significant number of candidates simply wrote a paragraph on him, moving on to write on their favourite religious experience scholar; those taking an atheistic approach used the writings of Marx and Freud extensively, whilst others used Hume and Kant. This rarely relate to the question adequately. Some students even wrote the acronym "pint" on their essays as substitution for a full explanation of passive, ineffable, noetic, and transient. Some candidates never mentioned James at all.

A significant number argued – rather unconvincingly – that the Toronto Blessing is a particularly persuasive piece of evidence.

- 4 This was a popular question. Some candidates apparently wrote two distinct answers, one a list of afterlife theories, the other an account of the problem of evil, with little connection between the two. Hick's replica theory had its usual annual outing, with John Smith off on his travels again. Better responses were able to link it directly to the question, but for too many, it appeared simply because it had been learned. Better answers considered what problems were raised by evil and then considered the adequacy of afterlife theories. It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess whether something resolves a problem if there is no clear statement of the problem itself.

Report on the Units taken in June 2010

An issue for some candidates was hell. Very many asserted that as the wicked would be punished then the problems of evil were resolved. They seemed unaware that for many scholars, including John Hick, hell as a place of eternal punishment is itself part of the problem of evil.

A number of candidates used the writings of Dawkins and atheism as a means to explain that if there is no afterlife then we need to deal with the problem of evil within the context of our lives here and now. Some candidates used Kant's moral argument and the *summum bonum* - God being the guarantor for the afterlife. Others referred to Marx and his ideas that the workers are happy to endure evil and suffering in this life because it will all be so much better in the afterlife, whilst others focused on Freud and the psychological reasons he gives for belief in God and the afterlife.

G582 Religious Ethics

General discussion

The questions gave candidates good scope for writing wide-ranging answers, but generally, answers were not of a high standard, with few really excellent answers for any of the questions. Answers were often superficial and did not address the specific requirements of the question, or simply gave limited subject knowledge.

The few candidates who did do well showed that they had read widely and produced some interesting and original responses.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 This was one of the more popular questions on the paper. Some responses ranged from ancient (Aristotle) to more modern interpretations from Hursthouse, Gilligan, Slote and Loudon. More limited responses stuck to Aristotle and MacIntyre.

Weaker candidates did not focus sufficiently on the question, but instead gave a general presentation of Virtue Ethics then concluded as whether it was better or worse than Utilitarianism or Kant.

Most candidates were able to discuss strengths and weaknesses, many excellent answers evaluating the different positions of the ethicists as they discussed the particular strengths and weaknesses.

It was good to see that most candidates understood that Virtue Ethics is about the person not action and there was good understanding of the golden mean, and following virtuous role models. However, a number of candidates maintained that Virtue Ethics' main weakness was its 'selfishness' and seemed unclear as to eudaimonia having a social aspect and leads to ways by which the community is supported.

- 2 Not many candidates attempted this question, and most of those who did, responded at a basic level, simply applying the Golden Rule or Situation Ethics. This produced some limited answers which explained how the Body Shop and John Lewis based their businesses on Christian principles. However, some excellent responses were able to talk about the insights of Religious Ethics which were useful in informing and shaping approaches to business. A few candidates developed excellent answers incorporating Amos on social justice and the teaching of Jesus on wealth in the story of the Rich Young Man and/or the Unjust Steward. A few candidates showed detailed knowledge of modern church teachings and successfully discussed their usefulness.

Business, and its link to the environment, featured in many responses. Many candidates simply wanted to write about Utilitarianism or Kantian ethics as an approach to business but with no attempt at evaluation or comparison - some candidates even used them as examples of Christian ethics.

- 3 This was the most popular question and there were a number of excellent responses. Much depended on whether the candidates understood the terms 'critically assess'. Many candidates did not engage with the question and seemed just to talk in general terms about Hard/Soft Determinism etc, concluding with their own particular view. There seemed to be a very real discrepancy within responses between the quality of the argument, knowledge and discussion on Hard Determinism and the other two approaches. Generally, sections on Hard Determinism made reference to many scholars including Newton, Hoppers, Skinner and Pavlov. It was rare that an essay failed to mention Clarence Darrow, although the actual details varied somewhat. There was also wide use of Calvin and Predestination, although candidates seemed less secure in their knowledge and understanding in this section. Some did mention Sartre, but with little development or application of his ideas.

However, some candidates used a wide range of knowledge, from Heisenberg, Chaos Theory, Iron Block Universe etc, and were able to apply this successfully to free moral decision making.

- 4 This was the more popular of the applied ethics questions on the paper. However, it did highlight a weakness in some candidates attempting this style of question. There was little use of specific cases or incidents to strengthen the arguments discussed by the candidates. Added to which, the use of specific ethical theories tended to be insubstantial and rather inconsequential with very little depth of response indicating a lack of any real understanding. The word 'helpful' was often ignored, and candidates simply discussed which ethical theory was the best approach. Homosexuality was mostly seen as a 'male' issue, concerning sexual relationships only.

Kantian Ethics and Natural Law were mostly dismissed as simply having a negative view of homosexuality and so seen as unhelpful as homosexuals are unable to reproduce naturally. Little effort was made by candidates to explore these ethics theories in any depth and apply them. Utilitarianism and Virtue Ethics were considered helpful as long as consenting adults were involved. Surprisingly few candidates considered any other issue or discussed the inclination versus practice issue.

However, this question did provoke far more engagement with the candidates than any other, and those who considered the attitudes of different societies, adoption, civil partnerships etc did so with considerable flair and understanding of the wider issues.

G583 Jewish Scriptures

General discussion

Question 2 was the least popular, probably because it is examining a relatively new component in the specification, but the questions seem to have been not only of equal parity and accessibility, but also to have achieved the intended differentiation.

Rubric infringements were rare and most candidates managed to complete the paper. There were some candidates, however, from one or two centres who only wrote a few lines in total. The main weakness of those who seemed to be taking the examination seriously, was a tendency to regurgitate lesson notes without due regard to engaging with the wording of the questions. The better responses tended to quote the set texts appropriately, made reference to issues of date, authorship, purpose and historicity when relevant and were a pleasure to read. Many candidates seemed to have enjoyed their studies and to have benefited from them.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 The set texts include the whole book of Amos but only chapters 1-3 and 14 of Hosea. Most candidates began by placing both prophets in the context of the eighth century BCE in Israel, the northern kingdom, at the time of the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II when social injustice and hypocritical worship were rife. Candidates selected the usual texts from the book of Amos to illustrate doom-laden oracles. For example, against the cruelty of neighbouring nations as well as oracles directed at Judah and Israel; also those against the cows of Bashan (the women of Samaria) etc. Good responses tended to include the five visions of Amos, ie locusts, fire, plumbline, over-ripe fruit and G-d beside the altar. They also explained that Amos sees the election of Israel as a responsibility not a privilege and some candidates included the key idea that Amos portrays G-d as just and preaches that therefore G-d requires justice from all people and particularly from the covenant people. Otherwise, according to Amos, as surely as the laws of cause and effect, punishment will follow.

With varying degrees of accuracy and detail, candidates gave accounts of Hosea's relationship with his wife Gomer which he used to illustrate the unfaithfulness of Israel to the G-d of covenant love (*hesed*). Most included the fact that Gomer's three children were given symbolic names: Jezreel; Lo-ruhamah 'no more mercy'; Lo-ammi 'not my people' but Hosea forgives and takes back his wife which reflects the cycle of adultery, judgement, tenderness and restoration which happens when Israel strays from her relationship with G-d.

Most candidates found evidence of love in the final chapter of Amos and of doom in Hosea when he castigates the sins of the people. Some argued against the statement because both doom and love are found in both books though in different proportions. Others concluded that the different proportions make it understandable that Amos is called the prophet of doom and Hosea the prophet of love so the statement is true.

- 2 The few who attempted this question began with an introduction about both books. Most knew that Ezekiel was carried away captive as a young man to Babylon in 598 BCE and Chapter 1 tells how his call to be a priest and prophet came in the fifth year of Exile. Some commented that the vision occurred by the River Chebar and this convinced him that G-d was still active in a strange land. There were attempts to describe Ezekiel's vision of the chariot of G-d and the wheels within wheels and some commented on the use of the word 'like' throughout the chapter which shows it is beyond description in the way that G-d is transcendent.

Some candidates took the traditional view linking Ecclesiastes with King Solomon, the father of wisdom in Israel, and they knew that it is in the Writings (Ketuvim) in the Tenakh. Others wrote that Ecclesiastes was probably written after the Exile but before the Maccabean upsurge of religious zeal, possibly from the third century BCE when Jewish Wisdom literature and Greek philosophy seem to have begun influencing each other.

On the whole, candidates handled the comparisons of the teaching about G-d quite well. General similarities were suggested in that all Jewish Scriptures assume that the living G-d acts in history, taking the initiative and revealing himself and all accept G-d as creator, ruler and judge. Some candidates gave textual evidence from Ezekiel 1 and Ecclesiastes 1-3 to support these assertions.

The difference most often cited was that the writer of Ecclesiastes does not doubt the existence of G-d but is beset with questions, recognising the power of G-d but the insignificance of humanity and the futility of 'chasing after the wind'. Like all wisdom literature Ecclesiastes is exploring the human dilemma but like all Jewish Scriptures there is never any doubt about the power of G-d. It is the theodicy that is the issue: the nature of the character of G-d that is being explored. This was familiar territory to candidates who remembered their studies of Jonah and Job and some gave their well-rehearsed conclusion that once again, the only response is to accept the will of G-d in personal life and world history but with trust.

- 3 Candidates were free to approach this question from any angle of study but they were expected to show some knowledge of Daniel 12 and 2 Maccabees 7. Some, however, identified the two passages as being under the heading of texts about Reward and Punishment and addressed the question they wished was on the paper. Accounts of the adventures of Daniel and, from 2 Maccabees 7, of the mother and her seven sons were of some relevance but gained more credit if made relevant to factors affecting the context eg date, authorship, purpose or historicity.

Some candidates demonstrated knowledge of the content of the set chapters and some understanding of the beliefs and how they might throw light on the purpose of the writers. Some discussed whether or not the texts show a development in beliefs, such as about life after death, by the time these chapters were written or edited.

Candidates tended to cover Daniel 12 about the end of the tribulation, the resurrection of the dead and the sealing of the prophecy to the time of the End. The responses of the sons of Hannah were quoted to show that they obviously believed in reward and punishment after death. There were some good responses which considered the chronology of historical events and of the writing of the texts. Some stayed with the traditional placing of Daniel as writing in the Exile whilst others suggested that both chapters were particularly of value during times of persecution such as the Maccabean struggle for independence in 165 BCE.

- 4 Curiously, only a few candidates began their essays with definitions concerning prophets as spokesmen for G-d, foretelling and forthtelling. Most candidates who began with a historical context placed Micah correctly as an eighth century prophet, a younger contemporary of Isaiah of Jerusalem, (during the reigns of the three Judaeen kings, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah according to the editorial superscription of the book of Micah which is a set text). It seemed possible that some candidates were thinking of Malachi which is not a set text. Some quoted Amos or Hosea purporting to be texts from Micah. Others got away with it by acknowledging Amos and Hosea but using their prophecies to provide the general background to the eighth century. There were also candidates performed badly because they had no idea of the contents of Micah but preferred to write a general essay about prophets foretelling the future.

Eighth century prophets were concerned about promoting social justice whilst condemning unreal religion but also made prophecies about the future. Micah is probably best known for his summary of the eighth century monotheistic ethical prophetic stance in chapter 6 verses 6-8. Competent candidates managed to fit this passage into their essays relevantly somewhere. The main messianic material is 5:1-5 and 7:1-10 whilst 4:1-5 is repeated in Isaiah 2:2-4 and good candidates homed in on those texts and tried to balance them with the other material. Some good responses kept the wording of the question in mind throughout the essay. They tended to argue that the condemnations of social injustice and unreal religion are among the main themes of the book. Some saw prophesying about the Messiah as the main task. Others argued that prophecies of the age of world peace in the book of Micah are more significant because even the messianic leader is mainly important as judge and arbiter of universal justice and mercy. Some concluded that in Micah, the hope for the future is also rooted like all his message in the theology of covenantal ethical monotheism which makes temporal past, present or future almost irrelevant.

G584 New Testament

General discussion

The first set of candidates entered for this unit has proved to be a varied one with an interesting spread in terms of both ability and enthusiasm. There was evidence of good preparation and use of resources and the majority of candidates showed good understanding of the demands of the questions. However, there was also evidence of a disparity in performance and approach to questions, according to the resources used. There was also some evidence of rote learned responses where candidates showed very little evidence of having studied the original text. The majority of the candidates achieved an even performance across both questions but there were some who produced one good answer and one very weak answer.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 This was the least popular question. However, it was confidently answered by some candidates who examined a range of evidence and opinion concerning the usual categories ascribed to the use of this title in the Old Testament, first century Judaism and rabbinic tradition. Some candidates who, otherwise gave very good answers, showing understanding and analysis of different viewpoints, glossed over references to Daniel 7 and the pertinent views of scholars, missing the opportunity to give a fully rounded answer.
- 2 This was a fairly popular question with a wide range of answers. The strongest answers were based on the parables in Matthew 25 and Luke 15 and examined the challenge these parables presented to Jesus' audience and to readers of the gospels. The best candidates demonstrated skilful deployment of the material to illustrate points of critical analysis and were able to argue holistically in a straightforward way. However, a weaker level of performance was demonstrated by candidates whose choice of parables was not as appropriate, eg The Sower or other parables from Mark 4, and these answers displayed some confused speculation as to the meaning of the parables and the arguments were generally weak and not sustained.
- 3 This was a very popular question and one which most markedly demonstrated the different approaches of candidates according to the type of resources they had used in their study of this topic. It was pleasing to see that many answers, at all levels of ability were enthusiastic and interesting. There were some excellent, comprehensive answers showing perceptive critical analysis of both controversial and traditional views on the nature and purpose of Jesus' miracles. Some candidates showed a high level of ability in selecting the relevant information from the wealth of material available on this topic. There was, however, a danger that some of the key ideas, in the gospel writers' presentation of the miracles, were omitted in answers which concentrated solely on views of Jesus as only one miracle worker among many.
- 4 This was another question which was tackled with enthusiasm. There were some very knowledgeable and clearly critical answers, demonstrating an in depth study of the text and the views of commentators. Answers were often wide ranging, containing comprehensive details of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees and their hypocrisy over the law as well as the perceived ambiguities of the teachings in The Sermon on the Mount and Mark 10. In this question, all candidates appeared to achieve a level of success commensurate with their ability and demonstrated engagement with the question, even if the weaker answers did contain less information or inaccurate understanding.

G585 Development in Christian Theology

General discussion

In general, all the questions were tackled well and it was gratifying to see such wide-ranging theological and philosophical knowledge candidates had of the various topics.

Those who did well were those who could see the scope of the questions and were able to use their particular knowledge selectively. Amongst the weaker responses, candidates tended to address the topic in general, even though it was clear that they knew the material. There were many excellent answers and some demonstrated considerable maturity and originality.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 Although this was not a popular question the majority of those who attempted it did well. Most candidates had a clear grasp post-modernism and were able to highlight its rejection of external reality and meta-narratives. Some gave impressive, albeit brief, summaries of key thinkers such as Lyotard and Foucault. Many argued that Hick's pluralism was not post-modern although it bore some comparisons. Better candidates extended their arguments to look at Don Cupitt, who was deemed to be truly post-modern.

Weaker candidates found it hard to link pluralism and post-modernism meaningfully, partly because they only had a very vague understanding of post-modernism and therefore opted merely to describe Hick's pluralism. Mistakenly some candidates thought post-modernism referred to Feuerbach.

- 2 Most candidates could confidently comment on anonymous Christianity, but many found it hard to talk at length about the Church. The best answers gave a clear outline of Rahner's theology, often using his four theses, and discussed the merits and demerits of it. It was clear that some of Rahner's theological language had been learnt, and some candidates talked intelligently about the Invisible Church.

By way of analysis a few candidates had difficulty moving beyond the 'patronising' and 'imperialist' charge but better candidates discussed Rahner's exclusivist sub-text. Some candidates discussed Rahner with reference to Dominus Iesus; those who understood Dominus Iesus well were able to make some interesting contrasts however it needs to be made clearer to some candidates that there are some important differences between them (notably over the notion of deficiency and salvation).

As in previous years those who moved on to discuss Hick or Barth (or both) often failed to tackle the question fully. Better answers are always those which concentrate on the internal problems and coherency of the particular theologian and his ideas.

- 3 Fewer candidates tackled this question, but those who did usually wrote some good arguments and made good use a very wide range feminist theology selected from the full spectrum of the specification.

Some candidates were unable to distinguish between secular feminism and feminist theology, but for those who did there were some impressive and lucid responses. A wide range of feminist theologians were introduced in some answers (such as Fiorenza, Ruether, Tribble and Pagels) – the most popular and generally well understood secular feminist writer was Simone de Beauvoir (although it was encouraging to see some exploration of Marxist and Freudian feminisms).

In general, candidates concluded that liberal feminist theologians thought secular reconstruction feminism was unnecessary, reconstructionists responded successfully and radical feminists such as Daly and Hampson considered that Christian theology would never be able to offer a satisfactory response to secular feminism of any kind.

- 4 Most candidates answered this question and responses were distinguished by their attention to the question and how they latched onto the word 'obvious'. Those who began and ended by considering what 'obvious' means often wrote 'sparky' and interesting essays.

There were many valid and quite different approaches to this question. Some, for example, focused on the biblical presentation of women and talked about the patriarchy of the texts and the flashes of equality to be found in Paul. Others took a more historical route and focused on Augustine, Aquinas and Luther and then looked at various feminist responses to these to the question of leadership. Some considered feminist suspicion of leadership and its implications.

Even amongst better candidates there was a slight tendency to list points and this did not enable them to develop arguments further. This was particularly the case when candidates tried to explore the ideas of feminist theologians on leadership. Rather than outlining the ideas of individual theologians, exploring their implications for different models of leadership, many candidates simply summarised the ideas of a range of different theologians and made obvious points about leadership. In these cases fewer points discussed in greater depth would have been far more successful.

G586 Buddhism

General discussion

In some cases, there was clear evidence that centres were preparing candidates well for the examination. The best answers demonstrated awareness of a range of scholars and good understanding of the material studied. Candidates showed an ability to interact with the material and use it to address the specific question asked.

Weaker answers showed less understanding of the material, and tended to adopt a scattergun approach to the topic they were addressing, by telling us everything they knew about that topic.

Weaker responses also tended to show an AS style approach to questions - describing or explaining in the first part of the response and evaluating only in the final paragraph or two. Better responses tended to address the question from the very beginning of the response, evaluating material throughout.

Some candidates clearly felt the need to relate the Parable of the Burning House whenever they referred to the concept of upaya kausalya. Centres may wish to remind them that they can discuss the concept without relating the parable unless it is directly relevant to the question.

There were very few rubric errors.

Comments on individual questions

1 This was a popular question, and elicited a variety of responses.

The weakest candidates demonstrated little awareness of the concept of nibbana, often equating it with heaven or paradise, and providing unhelpful comparisons with Christianity or Islam.

Most candidates offered some attempt to explore whether different groups of Buddhists aimed for nibbana. Often Pure Land Buddhists were offered as evidence but not all did, Pure Land practitioners aiming for Sukhavati instead, whereas Theravadin or various other Mahayana schools were proffered as evidence that Buddhists did aim for nibbana.

The best candidates were aware of the nuances between different Buddhist schools, for example exploring the different views of Pure Land and True Pure Land schools towards Sukhavati and whether Sukhavati was seen as a final or interim aim. There were also some very interesting explorations of the concept of sunyata and the Zen attitude towards tathagatagarbha discussing whether it is possible to aim for that which already exists but simply needs to be realised.

Some candidates addressed the issue of using the term 'aim'. Where this was done well it elicited a good discussion of whether aiming for something implied tanha, and thus was counter-productive to its achievement.

2 This was not a popular question and seemed to be chosen primarily by weaker candidates. References to the 'Buddhist ethics' element of the question were sporadic and often superficial.

Most candidates tried to outline the five precepts, offering limited evaluation at the end of their essay. Many candidates were only able to name three or four of the five. The descriptions of the five precepts were often superficial, for example talking about not lying rather than exploring the wider implications of avoiding gossip and slander or harming others through speech.

Better responses tended to explore how the five precepts supported or expanded the sila element of The Eightfold Path, or explored how useful they were for a lay Buddhist faced with an ethical decision.

- 3** This was the least popular question on the paper. Many candidates did not seem to have a clear understanding of what was meant by Buddhism in the West, and this hampered their ability to answer the question.

Some candidates argued that Buddhists who came and lived in Britain were betraying their families and home countries, but if they wanted a better life then that was their choice.

Some candidates were able to point to specific Buddhist traditions which might be hard to maintain in the West, for example the alms round for bhikkhus, but showed little awareness of how this had been addressed by Buddhists and whether this could be seen as a betrayal. Some candidates clearly thought all Buddhists participated in the alms round rather than just bhikkhus.

The best responses tended to refer to specific Buddhist traditions in the West, talking about a monastery they had visited or a group they had studied. They were then able to point out what adaptations had been made, and explore whether these adaptations were any more or less of a betrayal than the adaptations made within other Buddhist cultures.

Interestingly very few candidates referred to FWBO in their answers, and those who did often made inaccurate statements.

- 4** This was a popular question and elicited a variety of responses.

Intriguingly there were a number of candidates who knew very little about the Pali Canon but suggested that the Lotus Sutra or Heart Sutra were more important, with limited consideration of how or why the Pali Canon might be considered important. These candidates were often able to achieve higher marks on the AO2 element of the mark scheme than the AO1 element.

It was disappointing to see some candidates making basic factual errors, such as saying the vinaya pitaka contained the teachings of the Buddha, the sutta pitaka the rules for the monastic communities, the Lotus Sutra was divided into 3 parts and called the Tipitaka, or that the Dhammapada was a separate book and much more important than the Pali Canon.

There were however some outstanding responses. Some candidates were able to explore the contents of the Pali Canon in some depth and evaluate their importance to different groups within Buddhism. In general there were two approaches to the evaluative element of the question. Some candidates explored the value of the different pitakas to lay and monastic Buddhists before reaching a conclusion about which part of the Pali Canon was most relevant to each group. Other candidates explored the relative importance of Pali Canon to different Buddhist schools in comparison to other scriptures. Both approaches could, and did, generate excellent responses.

G587 Hinduism

General discussion

In some cases, there was clear evidence that centres were preparing candidates well for the examination. The best answers demonstrated awareness of a range of scholars and good understanding of the material studied. They showed an ability to interact with the material and use it to address the specific question asked.

Weaker answers showed less understanding of the material, and tended to adopt a scattergun approach to the topic they were addressing, by telling us everything they knew about that topic.

Weaker responses also tended to show an AS style approach to questions - describing or explaining in the first part of the response and evaluating only in the final paragraph or two. Better responses tended to address the question from the very beginning of the response, evaluating material throughout.

Some candidates felt the need to explain etic and emic approaches to Hindu issues. While this has a place with reference to some questions not all candidates understood where and when this was, and appeared to shoe-horn the concepts into their response regardless of whether it was appropriate to that specific question.

There were very few rubric errors.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 Most candidates were able to construct an argument by exploring the aims of different Hindu traditions before reaching a conclusion. Some candidates perhaps spent too much time describing the beliefs and practices of each tradition rather than evaluating how far this evidence supported the claim that all Hindus were aiming for moksha.

The best candidates were often aware of the differing aims of differing traditions, some making effective references to mukti and kaivalya for example.

Others effectively argued that for some Hindus moksha was so distant an aim that considering their aim to be reincarnation and rising in the caste system would be more accurate.

Others explored whether aiming for moksha was a misnomer, referring to the concept of disinterested dharma found in the Bhagavad Gita for example as evidence that aiming for moksha was not appropriate.

- 2 This was a popular question.

Many candidates were able to describe the various elements of varnashramadharma in great detail. They were not as adept at exploring its importance however.

Most candidates began by exploring the four varnas and the dalits, often including their origins and the concepts of endogamy and commensality. They then explored the four ashramas, in most cases appearing to view them as a neat process through life, where one starts as a student and ends as a sannyasin. Finally they explored the concept of dharma, and the need to act for a Hindu to act appropriately with regard to their varna and ashrama.

Whilst most candidates made some reference to varnashramadharmā being important for ensuring a Hindu acted in such a way as to achieve good karma there was rarely much development beyond this.

A few candidates explored whether varnashramadharmā was as relevant for those following the jnana path as a sannyasin as it was for a householder on the karma path for example. Alternatively some explored whether dalits and women were excluded from the system therefore rendering it of less importance to them.

Centres may wish to remind candidates of the need to address both assessment objectives in their responses.

- 3** This was the least popular question. Responses tended to be weak. Candidates often just described having seen Hare Krishna devotees in their town centre, or occasionally explained their own personal experiences of being a Hindu in Britain. Very few addressed the issue of whether Hinduism in the West is a betrayal of Hindu origins.

Better candidates explored the development of Hinduism in the West during the time of Empire, and whether the traditions imported to the West reflect Hinduism in its entirety.

- 4** This was not a popular question.

Answers to this question tended to be very good or poor with few responses in the middle range.

Poor responses often confused smṛiti and śruti literature, making it hard to formulate a valid argument. Even where candidates provided the correct definitions of these terms they then often assigned specific scriptures to the wrong group. Very few seemed aware that some scriptures were regarded as smṛiti by some Hindus and śruti by others.

The best candidates tended to take specific scriptures and analyse how they were used by different Hindus before reaching a conclusion. They were thus able to explore issues of authority, influence, and popularity.

G588 Islam

General discussion

Some candidates fulfilled the demands to achieve the highest bands in the marking scheme but a large number – seemingly more than in previous years - gained very low marks, mainly because they seemed to be unable to discuss or evaluate. Overall the four questions were virtually equally popular though some whole centres favoured particular questions and there was a tendency not to address the actual wording on the examination paper in favour of some pre-prepared essay touching on the same topic.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 There were some excellent responses, including a whole centre which quoted scholars and provided critical analysis of different viewpoints, but a very large number of candidates wrote essays that were very simplistic or grossly incorrect. Some candidates stated that all Sufis were Shi'a Muslims and then proceeded to compare and contrast Sunni and Shi'a traditions. Most centres did manage to explain that Sufis follow the Shari'ah, the external legal and moral code of Islam, but that they also follow the path of spiritual development known as tariqah, in which they are trained by Shaykhs or Pirs to seek purity of heart. Only a few centres included a brief historical perspective of the origins of Sufism though some did provide a possible explanation of the name. Good candidates tended to focus on describing the aspects of Sufism which are relevant for addressing the question such as the tendency in Sufism to internalise and allegorise Islamic teachings or the use of dhikr recitations, poetry, music and dancing to achieve the mystical state. Some excellent candidates homed in on the phrase 'true Islamic teachings' and discussed how far the Sufi interpretations are an inevitable part of the mystical tradition existing since the time of Muhammad ﷺ. Some suggested that the witness of Sufism counters materialism and the emphasis on spirituality helps to stop Islam becoming too legalistic. Discussions included the reservations that some Muslims have about asceticism and the pursuit of ecstatic states not only for theological reasons but because of occasional alleged malpractice by individual Shaykhs. Good candidates were clearly trying to discuss in a balanced manner whether or not distortion is an apt and fair description of Sufi teachings.
- 2 Despite 'the principles of the first ummah' being in the specification under Surah 4 some candidates seemed to think that 'the first ummah' was the local Muslim community. They still managed to gain some credit. The majority, however, attempted some sort of definition of ummah as the worldwide Muslim community. Some gave an account of Muhammad ﷺ founding the ideal community in Madinah (originally Yathrib) where there was no discrimination on the basis of colour, class or descent and the equality of individuals was an essential feature.

Some gave details of the different groups that needed to be united and quoted the last sermon which says, 'O people, none is higher than the other unless he is higher in obedience to Allah etc.' Surah 4 is a set text and many responses referred to the principles laid down in Surah 4 that have permanently governed Muslim Law and social practice since Madinah, with candidates usually itemising the concern shown for the poor, orphans, widows and the needy etc.

Some candidates managed to bring the Five Pillars into their essay in that these have always been visible signs of the Islamic way of life and the unity of ummah. Even the weaker responses managed to demonstrate some understanding of the relationship of the individual and the community in Islam. In reference to 'today' some candidates turned their attention to the on-going importance of the principles of the first ummah for Muslims facing issues in non-Muslim countries in the modern world.

- 3 Most candidates began by outlining the basic beliefs of Islam with some explanation of 'the last day'. Competent responses soon brought in the articles of Muslim belief as listed in the specification: Allah, angels, scriptures, messengers, the last day, the divine decree (al Qadr). These articles are also listed in Surah 4:135 which is a set text. Some candidates explained that the articles of belief can be grouped into three topics: Tawhid, Risalah and Akhirah.

Most candidates explained that Muslims believe life on earth is temporary whilst Akhirah is never ending and that all must be judged by Allah on Yawmuddin so, in the opinion of many candidates, preparation for the Day of Judgement is to the fullest extent what all life is about.

There were some graphic descriptions of hell which were very depressing reading. Some candidates, however, commented that though from Surah 1 they are told to follow the straight path to avoid 'wrath' it should not be done out of fear but for love of Allah and they tried to balance the importance of Akhirah with Tawhid and Risalah. Others worked their way through all the articles and when they reached angels they provided lists of the roles of angels in the process of judgement.

- 4 Most responses began by defining Jihad as 'striving' or 'trying one's utmost' to defend the faith against enemies of Islam and to gain Allah's favour. Candidates usually explained Lesser and Greater Jihad fairly well and gave examples of both. Some traced Jihad back to the time of Muhammad ﷺ and to events in later Islamic history that led to the distinction being made. Many candidates built on the distinction between different kinds of Jihad to further the discussion about misunderstandings. Markers got the impression that many weaker candidates were answering the question, 'Why is Jihad misunderstood?' rather than the question on the paper. These candidates laid the blame mainly on the media and on other Muslims who have been brainwashed or misled in some way. Candidates who addressed the question as written chose other contenders for the potential role of 'most misunderstood concept' and usually chose the role of women in Islam.

Another suggested 'most misunderstood' item was thinking that Jihad was a sixth pillar. There were, however, some responses which demonstrated a perceptive grasp of Jihad as part of the larger theological concept of living in submission and spiritually striving to preserve the Muslim way of life to establish peace, justice, the rule of Allah and the will of Allah for creation.

G589 Judaism

General discussion

In general, candidates performed reasonably well in the examination and there was evidence that some had been thoroughly prepared for the demands of the new specification. There were a number of outstanding scripts which not only demonstrated evidence of wider reading but real intellectual engagement with and reflection on the issues. Equally, there were a number of repetitive answers where candidates failed to focus on the question set and merely rehearsed their prepared response to the topic, making it hard to be sure in some cases which question was actually being answered.

All four of the questions were attempted although questions 2 and 3 proved the most popular. The vast majority of candidates were able to complete two questions in the time allocated and there were no rubric infringements. The examination did allow candidates to respond at their own level.

Comments on individual questions

- 1 Many candidates began their discussion by focusing on the concept of stewardship and nearly all were able to cite relevant scriptural background, particularly Genesis. Most included some discussion of kibbutzim and the difficulties faced by the early Zionist settlers. Some produced excellent, detailed description of Shemittah and how the mitzvah challenges human complacency and financial self-assuredness. Surprisingly few discussed the modern environmental problems facing Israel as the result of mass immigration and rapid industrialisation, although some described the impact that warfare had had on the physical environment. For a minority of candidates, the term Promised Land merely provided a trigger to write all they knew about Zionism.

In their evaluation, a number of candidates included good discussion of the attitudes of the different divisions within Judaism to the land, notably the secular and religious Zionists. Many argued that respect for the environment is a key feature of Judaism and always has been and will be important. A handful fastened on the words 'now, more than ever' in the question and proceeded to argue that Israel stands at an ecological crossroads.

- 2 The majority of candidates began their discussion by describing the Biblical ideas of the Messianic hope and the nature of the Messianic age as this is understood in the traditional thinking; those scholars whose views received the most attention were Maimonides and the Maharal. Some candidates then developed their response by discussing how the views of Progressive Judaism may well have been influenced by the changing attitudes in society. Some focused on modern naturalistic interpretations of the Messianic hope developed in classical Reform. Unhappily, a large number of candidates could do little more than state that Progressive Judaism emphasised a new age rather than a personal Messiah. Some erroneously discussed Messianic Jews as a group within mainstream Progressive Judaism.

Many candidates argued that Messianic hope can be of no real importance to Progressive Jews as they have abandoned explicit belief in the Messiah. Others were less certain, arguing that belief in a Messianic age – a world filled with peace and justice looked forward to by Isaiah – suggests that Messianic hope is of importance to all Jews...it is just that Progressive Judaism differs to Orthodox belief in what is entailed and what the new age will be like.

- 3 A number of candidates began their response by outlining their understanding of the meaning of the term 'biblical exile' in the question. Some identified biblical exile with the historical exile of Israel to Babylon in the sixth century BCE, while others made reference to the dispersion of the Jewish people 70 CE to the present; both usages were accepted by the Examiners, together with the concept of separation from G-d and the Land of Israel and from the Torah.

Candidates included good discussion of the biblical view of exile as a punishment for sin and as a means of purification and preparation. Some discussed the positive value of exile for Jewish identity, and the opportunities afforded Jews to be a force for good in the non-Jewish world. Many discussed the origins, development and different types of Zionism and related this to the question aims. Nearly all discussed the effect of the Holocaust in giving urgency to the Zionist movement for the creation of a Jewish homeland.

Many candidates discussed the importance of the biblical exile as an integral part of modern Judaism, arguing that if there were no exile then there would be no concept of redemption and no Messiah. Some argued that the biblical exile is a catalyst for Jews to return to the land; others maintained that because of exile Jews should not return to the land. The majority of candidates saw the Holocaust as the major reason for living in Israel.

- 4 The majority of candidates began their discussion by outlining the origins of Hasidism. Most had good knowledge of the life of the founder, the Baal Shem Tov, and understood the reasons why the movement met with early opposition; notably from the Vilna Gaon. Most focused on Hasidism as a movement with the emphasis on passionate devotion to G-d, and some included good discussion of the concept of *devekut* (attachment to G-d). A handful of candidates mentioned the work of Shneur Zalman and his efforts to draw the movement back to being accepted. Nearly all discussed the importance of *rebbe*, the place of women in the movement, and Hasidic dress and ritual observance. A number included good discussion of Hasidism today, particularly the work of the Lubavitch movement. When comparing Hasidism to other divisions within Judaism, the Examiners noted that some candidates erroneously included the Masorti movement within the fold of Progressive Judaism.

Most candidates denied the statement in the question, arguing that Hasidism is a dimension within traditional Judaism whose members believe that the Torah, both written and oral, was revealed by G-d to Moses. Some argued that if there is one 'true' division within Judaism that it is certainly Hasidism whose members faithfully observe the *mitzvot*. Others argued that the ways of Hasidic Jews reflect a different age and are not helpful to Judaism in the modern world.

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