

STUDIES OF RELIGION

In 1995 4577 candidates attempted the 1 Unit examination while 220 candidates attempted the 2 Unit examination in Studies of Religion, which continues to be one of the fastest growing of the subjects presented at the Higher School Certificate Examination.

General comments

The 1995 Higher School Certificate Studies of Religion examination paper was very well received both for the quality of the questions and the way in which they reflected the aims of the Syllabus.

As is now standard procedure, each examination answer was double-marked. The performance of the candidates was, in the majority of cases, extremely pleasing and indicated that both the 1 Unit and the 2 Unit courses are being taken seriously by the majority of the candidates, who are coping with the demands of the course and preparing themselves effectively for the examination.

It is stressed that:

- (1) The mark value of each part of the structured questions should be used as an indicator of the amount of time and space to be allocated for the answer to each part of the question.
- (2) Students should write on sections of the Syllabus that they have actually studied; those who write outside the areas that they have studied seldom achieve high marks.
- (3) Prepared answers are obvious and are seldom awarded high marks. Although there was some evidence of *answers in search of a question* this was not a major problem.
- (4) The instructions on the front page of the examination paper and at the beginning of each section of the paper should be read carefully. This year large numbers of 1 Unit candidates answered both questions in Section II - Foundation Studies, even though only ONE was required, some of these students then ran out of time in answering their Cross-Religion question in Section III.

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- (5) Candidates should read all parts of a question before beginning their answers because, in most of the questions, all parts are related to, and depend on, each other.
- (6) Candidates will be penalised if they describe only one variant of a religious tradition in the Cross-Religion Section of the Syllabus.

SECTION I : FOUNDATION STUDIES

The question in this Section is COMPULSORY (2 Unit Course and 1 Unit Course)

Question 1

This question was compulsory. It included a line drawing and quotation and dealt with the period 1788 to 1900 in Australia's religious history.

At the first raising-of-the-flag ceremony at Sydney Cove in 1788, the official instructions to Governor Phillip included the following statement:

"Enforce an appropriate observance of religion and good order among the inhabitants of the new settlement".

The drawing was included to prevent the confusion that occurred in a previous year when the words "European settlement of Australia" were interpreted by some students to mean the period of European migration after World War II.

Above average responses

These responses generally answered correctly and succinctly parts 1(a) *name two of the Christian denominations* (to which the soldiers and convicts belonged), and 1(b) which asked students to identify what was meant by *appropriate observance of religion and good order among the inhabitants*.

- (b) In this part these students noted the mandatory weekly attendance at Anglican church services, whatever the religious background of the inhabitants might have been in Britain or Ireland, as a key aspect of the meaning of the words *appropriate observance of religion* quoted in the stimulus material.
- (c) Here above average responses were able to give some focus to the *relationship* between *observance of religion* and *good order* as required by the question, and offered both analysis and insight. They offered a good range of examples from different religious groups in support of their answers, which contained accurate historical details relating to the period stated in the question (1788 - 1900).

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Average responses

In these candidates identified only one Christian denomination; some wrongly identified Jews as belonging to a Christian denomination. Others could identify only *Catholics and Prodestance* (sic).

- (b) Average responses to this part offered only a general and basic attempt to describe what was meant by both terms.
- (c) Such responses to this part referred to one historical period only, generally the period around 1788. They described, with some accuracy, elements of Australia's post-1788 history, but with little or no discussion of the *relationship* between the *observance of religion* and *good order*. In some average responses candidates used religious terminology inaccurately, for example, the Church of England service of Morning Prayer (also called Matins), the principal form of worship which all the English and Irish Catholic convicts were forced to attend each Sunday, was often inaccurately called *Mass*.

Poor responses

- (a) Many of these responses mentioned non-Christian religions or confused religion with ethnicity.
- (b) This part often contained no accurate information, for example, long descriptions about the original Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia rather than the soldiers and convicts mentioned in the question.
- (c) Brevity and lack of depth were characteristic of responses to this part. Some may have focussed on themes outside the limits of the question, for example, Australia's post-World War II immigration. Alternatively, in these responses, candidates made sweeping statements about religion in Australia, unsubstantiated by historical facts. Poor responses usually failed to understand the link between part (c) and the two earlier parts of the question.

General comments

In 1995 the candidature appeared to possess a good working knowledge of the Syllabus Outcomes relating to the influence of religion on Australian society. Students were able, on the whole, to *comprehend the primary influence of Christianity after 1788 on Australian society* (Studies of Religion Syllabus, page 20) but *analysis* and *critical comment* of those facts was demonstrated only in the responses of the best candidates.

Some candidates' answers to question 1(b), while well, and sometimes even superbly, written, were far too long in relation to the 2 marks available, and also when compared to the length of the answers to part (c), which was worth 6 marks. Moreover, some candidates tended to focus their responses on one part, rather than on the whole of the period referred to in the question (1788 - 1900).

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SECTION II : FOUNDATION STUDIES

Question 2 (2 Unit Course only)

This question began with the following boxed quotation which was to be used as stimulus material:

For many years, the spirituality of Aborigines has not been understood by other members of society and, therefore, has not been recognised as being the essence of life and living for the Aboriginal peoples.

Candidates were then asked:

- in (a) Describe the areas of misunderstanding regarding Aboriginal spirituality in the first fifty years of the colony of NSW, and
- in (b) Discuss how some of the recent attempts to overcome these differences reflect new understandings of Aboriginal spirituality.

Above average responses

These answers provided an excellent analysis of Aboriginal spirituality, especially in relation to concepts relating to the Dreaming, the pivotal role of the land in Aboriginal spirituality, and the importance of kinship. Misunderstandings which resulted in the European belief that Aboriginal peoples apparently had no religion came about because the indigenous Australians had no temples or churches, no priests or liturgy, apparently no liturgical worship, no concept of prayer to a god or gods, no sacred writings, and no outward manifestations of gods or idols in human or animal form as accepted in the Christian religion practised by the settlers.

Responses to part (b) often mentioned the statement *with respect and acceptance comes tolerance* and included some or all of the following examples:

- acknowledgment of the unique relationship that Aboriginal people have with the land, hence the importance of Land Rights and the Native Title legislation;
- a knowledge of the diversity that exists between Aboriginal groups;
- the fact that Aboriginal ceremonies have been incorporated into significant national and/or religious events such as the Smoke Ceremony before the service of beatification of Blessed Mary McKillop by Pope John Paul II;
- the inclusion of Aboriginal material in ceremonies for the opening of the Australian Council of Churches Conference and the official opening service of the National Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia in St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne;

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- official church pronouncements which provide new understandings;
- the return of sacred sites to Aboriginal people, for example, Uluru and important burial sites;
- a new appreciation of Aboriginal designs and artworks which have been used to decorate Christian churches and places of worship, or in the decoration of liturgical robes;
- the ordination of Aboriginal priests and ministers and the consecration of the first Aboriginal bishop, George Arthur;
- of the need to restore Aboriginal families previously broken up by the forced removal of children;
- the availability of Abstudy grants and scholarships;
- the importance of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (part of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in the Commonwealth Parliament);
- the 1988 National Day of Prayer and Reconciliation;
- the provision of theological training for Aboriginal peoples and the establishment of Batchelor College, Nunga Imya Theological College;
- a growing awareness that theological and missionary activity of the type common in the nineteenth century is no longer appropriate (if it ever was) for Aboriginal Australians;
- the fact that study and discussion of Aboriginal spirituality is now included in some Australian school syllabuses.

Average answers

- (a) In this category, candidates provided a basic description of Aboriginal spirituality as well as a brief description of the areas of misunderstanding of that spirituality, or an incomplete account of both.
- (b) In answering this part these candidates included only some recent attempts to overcome differences or provide new understandings.

Below average answers

Candidates in this category were able to discuss only a few unrelated facts on Aboriginal spirituality and included facts that were either inaccurate or irrelevant. Their answers to part (b) were vague and often they were unable to provide a single relevant example of recent attempts to overcome these differences.

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Question 3 (2 Unit), Question 2 (1 Unit) : Religious Harmony

This question was based on the boxed quotation:

People who share a religious view of the world recognise that they have much in common.

Part (a) required TWO examples of how religious harmony is being achieved and part (b) asked candidates to discuss how these examples of working together reflect common aspects of religious views of the world.

Above average responses

- (a) Candidates in this category provided two specific examples and were able to explain them accurately, giving contemporary examples that related to Australia. These candidates showed how religious traditions or religious denominations within the Christian tradition work together in harmony (although some suggested that *tolerance* rather than *harmony* would have been more appropriate in the wording of the question).
- (b) Here the discussion of the same examples was sustained and broadened to include a more philosophical view of the world shared by religions and religious denominations. The very best answers described the strong links between the examples and universal principles.

Average responses

- (a) Here average responses either discussed only one example, and such discussion was well developed, or provided generalised points citing, for example, Ecumenicalism, but without providing specific examples; otherwise they described social and cultural examples (such as the work of Lifeline, the Salvation Army or St Vincent de Paul in helping the needy, whatever their religious beliefs may be) rather than specific religious examples.
- (b) Responses to this part were descriptive, with little mention or link to the world view.

Below average responses

Answers in this category were often brief and failed to recognise the specific relationship between parts (a) and (b) of the question.

- (a) Here candidates used irrelevant examples that were either poorly identified or which simply discussed at random *world peace and harmony*.
- (b) In answering this part candidates showed that they obviously had no concept of common world views among religious traditions.

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Question 4 (2 Unit), Question 3 (1 Unit) : Two Issues

This question required students to discuss the religious responses to any TWO of the following issues which have been important in the development of Australian society:

- The conscription debate of World War I
- Divorce/family law
- Government aid for religious schools
- Growth of the labour movement
- HIV/AIDS
- Nuclear weapons
- Poverty and unemployment
- Refugees
- Sabbath observance
- The Vietnam War moratorium

Above average responses

In these responses candidates showed that they obviously possessed a sound knowledge of the TWO issues chosen. As well as giving precise details, these answers clearly outlined the *religious response* to each, often referring to a range of examples from different variants of the religious tradition or different periods of history. Some students were also able to relate the importance of the issue to the development of Australian society by placing it in a wider context and *discussing* it. The most commonly chosen topics were *Government aid for religious schools* and *the conscription debate of World War I*. Many students gave detailed historical accounts of the events or of the particular issues, but in spite of historical data in such answers, those who failed to provide discussion of religious responses to the issues received only average marks.

Average responses

These tended to contain a general description of TWO specific issues and included some facts relating to them. Many responses were couched in very general terms and failed to give specific examples of *religious responses*. Some of these answers contained few historical facts or were obviously based on little knowledge about the chosen issue.

Below average responses

Most students chose TWO issues but knew very little about them and many based their responses on an ethical viewpoint rather than on one related to the religious development of Australian society. Others in this category were able to write about only one of the issues listed in the question.

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SECTION III : CROSS-RELIGION STUDIES

In this section of the paper, 2 Unit candidates were required to select TWO questions, while 1 Unit candidates selected only one question. The instructions at the beginning of this section should have been carefully observed, viz:

Note: In Section III the term *religious tradition* refers only to Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or Judaism.

Teachers and students are reminded that they must include variants within their answers rather than merely concentrating on one variant, for example, Catholicism or Anglicanism, in describing Christianity, or Orthodox or Reformed in describing Judaism.

Because these questions have different numbering sections on the 2 Unit and the 1 Unit papers, they will be referred to by their name in the Syllabus.

Rites of Passage : Question 5 (2 Unit), Question 4 (1 Unit)

This question had, as stimulus material a photograph of a typical Australian citizenship (or naturalisation) ceremony held under gum trees at a school.

- (a) Here candidates were asked to explain why this ceremony was a rite of passage and to show in what ways it differed from any other daily activity such as dressing or eating a meal.
- (b) This part required candidates to define why some rites of passage are described as religious and to describe the (religious) teachings and practices that give meaning to ONE rite of passage from ONE religious tradition.
- (c) This question began with the statement *In a religious rite of passage, the words spoken and the symbolic actions performed help to identify the status of the individual before, during, and after the completion of the rite.* Students are required to choose ONE rite of passage common to TWO religious traditions to explain the statement.

Above average responses

- (a) In these responses candidates were able to explain clearly the effect of a rite of passage such as the citizenship ceremony on the life of the individual. Giving more than one reason, they showed how such rites differed from everyday rituals.
- (b) In this part candidates could clearly define a religious rite of passage, and focussed on the teachings and practices that give meaning to ONE specific rite of passage from ONE religious tradition. The best students linked this rite with the formal

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doctrines. They emphasised the *meaning* of the rite rather than describing the ritual.

- (c) In this part they were able to organise their information and discuss the links between the words, the symbolic actions and the status of the individual before, during and after the rite of passage. They possessed precise knowledge of the actions, discussed how similar actions differ in the two traditions and quoted or referred to the words actually used in the rites. Their answers were well organised and equal emphasis was given to the two traditions chosen and, most important of all, variants within the tradition were acknowledged.

Average responses

- (a) In this part average candidates showed that they had a basic understanding of a rite of passage and could describe the citizenship ceremony in terms of such understanding. They could also indicate how everyday activities differ from rites of passage.
- (b) Responses to this part included some general statements about what made a rite of passage religious. Here rites of passage were described in some detail without much reference to the question asked. Although some candidates made some points about certain beliefs and practices, they were unable to link them to the chosen rite of passage.
- (c) For this part some candidates tended to write down all they knew about a rite from TWO religious traditions and did not organise their responses to answer the question actually asked on the examination paper. Some gave a better description of one tradition's rite, and others tended to equate the rite of a particular variant within a tradition with the whole of the tradition and failed to acknowledge the range of *words spoken and symbolic actions* in the tradition. Many had difficulty in linking their descriptions to the status of the individual before, during and after the rite of passage. Some students, however, did not allow themselves sufficient time to answer this section of the question.

Below average responses

- (a) In these responses candidates did not show that they really understood the nature of a rite of passage. They sometimes used parts of a definition they had memorised but could neither apply it to the citizenship ceremony nor identify it in relation to everyday rituals.
- (b) These candidates also tended to give a confused definition of a religious rite of passage in this section. They described the rite of passage in some detail but their description was often confused, contained inaccuracies, or aspects of the rites of more than one religious tradition.

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- (c) Here there was a tendency simply to describe some aspects of the rite of passage. Often in these responses candidates were unable to discuss examples from TWO religious traditions or incorporated examples from more than two traditions and from secular practice in their confused responses.

Religion and Ethics : Question 6 (2 Unit), Question 5 (1 Unit)

Part (a) of this question asked students to state what is meant by the terms *ethics* and *moral behaviour*, while part (b) asked them to choose ONE ethical issue they had studied from the following list:

- Violence, war and peace
- Attitude to the environment
- Sexual behaviour
- Marriage and divorce
- Bioethical questions
- Works ethics
- Business and professional ethics

In part (c) students were asked to choose a different issue from the list and to compare their own view with those of TWO religious traditions they had studied. They then had to give reasons for their personal ideas.

Above average responses

- (a) Here candidates successfully explained the meaning of the two terms *ethics* and *moral behaviour*.
- (b) In this part they were required to describe a specific issue they had studied. They successfully identified similarities and differences and showed an understanding of the ethical contest underlying the issue.
- (c) In this part they were able to state their own views, supporting them with reasons based on their own beliefs, or their own experiences, in relation to the teachings of two specific traditions. The final determinant for the above average mark was the ability to discuss variants within the traditions that had been studied.

Average responses

- (a) Here candidates could correctly define the given terms, usually giving only textbook definitions. They could discuss the issues according to the teachings of two specific traditions, but were not always sure of their similarities or differences.
- (c) In this part candidates gave their own views with few, if any, reasons. Sometimes students used one variant only here, or failed to answer the question.

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Below average responses

- (a) In this part below average candidates usually had difficulty in responding to the three different parts of the question, or answered only part of the question. Although some responses were quite long students showed that they had little knowledge of the issues and teachings of the traditions mentioned, and often used sweeping and incorrect statements. They were not sure which topics fitted into which issue, for example, sexual behaviour was sometimes included in responses on *Bioethical questions* and sometimes in those on *Marriage and Divorce*. A variant was often used when speaking for the whole tradition, and religious traditions other than Christianity were assumed not to have variants in the teachings and practices of that religious tradition.

Sacred Writings and Stories : Question 7 (2 Unit), Question 6 (1 Unit)

- (a) Part (a) of this question concerned the origins of one sacred writing from each of TWO traditions. Students were asked to identify the sacred writing as well as the language in which it was originally written (NB none of the sacred writings and stories *in this course* were written in English; a very large number of the candidates seemed to think that the Christian Scriptures were originally written in Latin by monks in monasteries).
- (b) In this part students were asked to show why a knowledge of sacred writings and stories is essential for an understanding of the TWO specific religious traditions.
- (c) This part asked how the acceptance of these sacred writings affects the behaviour of believers in the TWO particular religious traditions. Students were required to give examples in support of their answers.

It is stressed that all the relevant sections of the Syllabus should be taught.

Above average responses

These addressed all parts of the question, were related directly to specific text whose titles were accurately spelled, and described both traditions thoroughly.

- (c) Here there was a wide range of specific examples which were all relevant to the question. Although the quality of the best answers in this section seemed to be higher than in some other questions, there was also considerable variety in the length of the answers.

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Average responses

- (a) These were based on knowledge of the topic area but did not quite satisfy the requirements of the question. The information given tended to be non-specific and often one tradition was treated less than adequately. Few examples were used, and even some of those did not always relate to the question asked. Some answers included a general discussion of a theme, often rote learnt. These were answers in search of a question which, unfortunately for these students, was not on the examination paper. Many students appeared to be confused when the question did not directly ask about a particular *theme*.

Below average responses

These included only general statements, a confusion of facts and inaccurate statements showing that very little time or effort had been put into study of this topic by some candidates. Other answers either provided no relevant examples or only partially answered the question.

Ways of Holiness : Question 8 (2 Unit), Question 7 (1 Unit)

- (a) This part required a description of the different understandings of holiness in TWO religious traditions.
- (b) Here candidates were asked to indicate to what extent modern day living is changing the ways in which people seek holiness, using examples from TWO religious traditions.
- (c) This part required a discussion of THREE cultural or religious influences on ways of holiness in ONE religious tradition studied.

Above average responses

These showed a good understanding of a variety of ways through which holiness is sought within the religious traditions. There was a clearly drawn connection between the different understandings of holiness and, in these responses, candidates discussed the impact of secularisation and the cross-pollination of ideas and religious traditions in the modern world, and the ways in which people have tried to achieve holiness.

Average responses

Students had a clear understanding of different ways in which people seek holiness and made a good attempt at connecting traditions with changes, cultural influences and the effects of modern technology. The poorest of these responses tended to deal with the historical development of a specific religious tradition rather than with holiness itself, and concentrated on only one variant, usually Roman Catholicism.

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Below average responses

These were only basic attempts at answering the question. Brief mention was made of TWO traditions, but, in such responses, candidates either concentrated only on one variant or their responses contained major inaccuracies.

Teachers and Interpreters : Question 9 (2 Unit), Question 8 (1 Unit)

This question was attempted by only a small number of candidates and at least two of these failed to show that they had actually studied this Cross-Religion Study.

- (a) This part asked candidates to describe the major changes which have taken place in ONE religious tradition they had studied.
- (b) Here a discussion of the influence of an individual or school of thought on the development of this religious tradition in a time of growth, division or crisis was required.
- (c) This part required an explanation of the existence and cause of diversity within TWO religious traditions, either in their early foundation period or the contemporary period.

Above average responses

- (a) In this part students wrote clearly about the history of the religious tradition they had chosen.
- (b) Here they were able to identify an individual or school of thought in answering this part. Answers which used the life and work of John Calvin in answering this question were particularly well written. These responses provided a number of different sources rather than rote learning of material in text books.

Average responses

These were obviously less well written and many reflected confusion about the difference between an individual and a school of thought.

- (b) In this part only one individual (or school of thought) should have been referred to, not three.
- (c) Average responses here were also rather short.

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Below average responses

Students described *founders* (for example, Jesus) rather than *teachers* and *interpreters* or showed, by their gross inaccuracies and obvious inability to understand the question, that they had not studied this topic.

Women and Religion : Question 10 (2 Unit), Question 9 (1 Unit)

This question also began with a boxed statement to be used as stimulus material.

Women have been described as being the carers and the nurturers in bringing up children, and the upholders of religion within the family. Despite this, in every religious tradition, women face discrimination.

- (a) Here students were asked whether they agreed with the quotation and to provide examples from TWO religious traditions to support their answer.
- (b) Candidates were required in this question to compare the role and status of women in the TWO religious traditions they had studied.
- (c) In this part students were asked to choose ONE religious tradition they had studied and to explain, with examples, how women from within this tradition have challenged or maintained the tradition by their interpretation of its teachings and practices.

Above average responses

These responses demonstrated students' ability to apply knowledge accurately and to show their awareness of variety within and between traditions, e.g. reform and orthodoxy in Judaism as well as the Roman Catholic and Non-conformist traditions within Christianity. The examples of discrimination given were specific to two religious tradition and clearly indicated the ways in which this conflicted with the emphasis given to the roles of women as carers and nurturers.

Candidates also displayed an awareness of the distinctly different requirements of parts (a), (b) and (c) and their responses contained little or no repetition of material. Most appropriate examples were chosen to illustrate their responses to the questions and this was particularly evident in part (c). Their arguments were supported by reference to specific sacred writings or works attributed to women. These answers made interesting reading and those studying this section of the Syllabus are to be congratulated on the diligence with which many of them prepared for the examination.

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Average responses

In these responses students showed some knowledge but it was, however, often poorly integrated or superficial. Some seemed unsure of what to do with the knowledge they had. There was a tendency to write long and sometimes irrelevant biographies of religious women rather than to apply this information to the key words in the question, such as *role* and *status*, *challenge* and *maintain*, and *teachings* and *practices*. Occasionally a better response was spoiled by failure to answer, or to read a question carefully, for example, the use of only *one* example where more than one was required. Often a lack of knowledge of a whole tradition was apparent, with candidates concentrating on one variant only.

Below average responses

Many candidates misread the question or confused *religion* with *culture*. Insufficient knowledge led to some fairly alarming statements, such as stating that Jewish women pray in a mosque. Many responses were also very subjective or judgmental and contained many rambling generalisations and little or no relevant information. Sometimes candidates gave a few biographical details which were discussed in a confused and incompetent manner.

This was a good question which discriminated between the quality of responses very well and provided a good spread of marks; there were, however, an appalling number of scripts which referred to such things as Jewish churches, Jewish Bibles and Jewish Masses. Many students still seem to be concentrating on a variant of a tradition rather than on the whole tradition.

Final Remarks

All candidates should attempt questions on sections of the course that they have actually studied.

Candidates should read the whole of each question on the examination paper before beginning to write, and should plan their answers.