

# 2017 VCE Religion and Society examination report

## General comments

This was the first examination for the revised study design, and students were required to answer all questions. Students handled the examination well. They showed that they knew the beliefs in the seven belief groups and that there were nine aspects, and they were able to make use of these when responding to questions.

Students who had studied two traditions chose to use different traditions for particular questions rather than trying to use both traditions in answering each question requiring a tradition-specific answer.

Students answered questions directly and within the allotted spaces. However, many students wrote copiously for each question, often missing the focus of the question amid excessive and largely unnecessary information.

The incorporation of sources to provide evidence for the claims made in responses needs further development. Most students did not use supporting sources. Of those who did, many used sources that had no connection to the point being made or that did not match it adequately.

Students' inability to discuss and show analytical skill in responses indicated that wider research, using sources that offer different perspectives into content studied, needs to be completed.

Many students' vocabulary was inadequate.

Common areas of misunderstanding included the following:

- Myths are a type/form/genre of story. Frequently students referred to 'myths **and** stories'.
- Rituals are religious or solemn ceremonies/rites that have a series of activities including actions, gestures, words, singing and objects (including apparel), done in a prescribed order and often in a special place or space. Frequently students referred to 'the ritual of a named prayer' without further explanation of how and why the prayer is used in a particular ritual.
- Beliefs are particular ideas. It is not enough to say 'the belief in the Incarnation' or 'the belief in the oneness of God' and repeatedly use only that phrase. What precisely is the substance of that belief title?
- Categories of belief (Unit 3, Area of Study 1) were used as particular religious beliefs.
- Ethics principles were confused with religious beliefs.
- Religious beliefs (tenets) were used in different ways, often being confused with believing in – that is, the level of faith/confidence/acceptance/trust in an idea (tenet/belief). This misunderstanding of the term resulted in students not answering the question. Some of the beliefs chosen for Unit 3, Area of Study 2 were too close in their meaning and expression for students to be able to deal adequately with this question. This was apparent in responses from students who had two beliefs from the same category of belief (studied in Unit 3, Area of Study 1). Students who had connected beliefs from two different categories of belief (studied in Unit

3, Area of Study 1) had more content to use and were able to show the expressions of those two beliefs more clearly.

A weakness in student responses to questions related to Unit 3, Area of Study 3 was the lack of explanation of the actual beliefs of the individual studied. The naming of a belief in a word or two does not articulate the belief, nor show how the person understands it.

Individuals who went through change rather than strengthening of religious beliefs are better choices for study. Some students attempted to cover the whole life of the individual. Some individuals studied did not fit the new study design requirements.

### Challenges

In general, the challenges were treated in a narrow and simplistic manner. The wider and varied social, political and religious contexts for particular challenges need to be further developed. Challenges do not occur in historical vacuums. Often when the wider background is explored it becomes apparent that the initially named challenge may not be the primary challenge but rather a response that then creates further complexities.

Some of the selected challenges did not successfully demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills of the Area of Study. Students were unable to show why and how the named challenge was really a challenge to the religious tradition. The content of their responses focused on the challenge as a social issue, with sources reflecting the wider community responses rather than the stances and responses of the particular religious tradition(s). This was particularly apparent in responses by students who used contemporary challenges that did not cover the different requirements of the revised study design key knowledge and key skills points for Unit 4, Areas of Study 1 and 2.

## Specific information

**Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.**

This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

### Section A

In this section, conciseness and directness were the key elements for high-scoring responses. Restating the question, often changing its focus, should be avoided.

#### Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	21	33	28	12	2.2

Generally, this question was well answered, with the term 'beliefs' used correctly as a noun referring to ideas. Actual religious concepts were articulated clearly. Primary sources were used well to support the statement of the religious beliefs of the particular religious tradition.

High-scoring responses dealt directly with the child while also referring to a range of specific and detailed beliefs responding to the prompt, 'I want to know *why I was born*'.

Low-scoring responses ignored the question and just stated responses from the tradition for existential questions, making no attempt to express their response suitably for the child as required in the question.

Answers should have acknowledged that the response from the religious tradition was to be directed at the child and to his request, as per the examination question.

The focus should have been on beliefs – that is, clearly articulated actual ideas – about the origins and purpose of human existence from at least one tradition that responded appropriately to the child's request.

Some students provided quotations to support their statement, but this was not necessary for full marks if they had clearly and correctly stated the related beliefs.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*In the Roman Catholic tradition of Christianity, the mother would reply to the child's request to know "why I was born" by explaining the notion that humanity is created by a loving God who made humans in the image and likeness of God and that we are all born to be stewards (carers) of God's creation and are called to be 'Christ's hands and feet on earth' (St Teresa of Avila).*

## Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	9	35	38	17	1.7

Many responses ignored the categories of challenge and identified features of significant challenges such as longevity, scale, impact on adherents and loss of reputation.

A weakness in otherwise competent responses was the limited focus on challenges being significant only if negative to religion.

Low-scoring responses just listed three types of challenge – theological, ethical and continued existence – and gave a definition of them. However, no reference was made to the reasons for any challenge being significant for religion.

Some students focused on the term 'significant', ignored the rest of question and mistakenly wrote about significant challenge to an individual.

### Response guide

- Students needed to give a general response, not a tradition-specific response.
- One point said twice in different terms was not rewarded twice.
- Significance was linked in this question to the capacity for the challenge to create a change in stance or point of view that may lead to a different stance or to different supporting responses.
- Usually a significant challenge is one that a tradition finds difficult if not impossible to ignore, though responses may be delayed, spasmodic or carried out over lengthy periods.
- Challenges can be significant if they are seen by a tradition as posing serious risk, threat, uncertainty or contradiction to some aspect of the religion.
- It can also be significant if it leads to positive rethinking, stimulating reflection, new insights and opportunities for development in the tradition.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*A challenge is significant when highly unorthodox interpretations of fundamental beliefs occur, because it can destabilise the theological identity of a religious tradition. Challenges are also significant if they violate ethical principles of a religious tradition occurring as a result of law making, secularism and pluralism. A challenge is significant when it prevents the transmission of the tradition to others or suppresses the practice of a tradition, threatening the continued existence of the tradition.*

**Question 3**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	12	26	32	20	7	<b>2.8</b>

Students needed to give examples from a religious tradition in order to fully answer the question.

Possible points that could have been made and then supported with a tradition-specific example included:

- The aspect 'places' contributes to the search for meaning by providing a physical place for prayer, reflection, community gatherings and rituals, both communal and individual.
- The aspect 'places' creates a tangible area to feel connected to the ultimate reality.
- The aspect 'places' offers areas for reconnection with the origins and history of the tradition.
- Journeying to a special 'place' is part of the pilgrimage concept that facilitates spiritual experience.

Generally, there was a sound understanding of the concept of place and its role in providing meaning.

The highest-scoring responses were those that demonstrated more than one way that places contribute to the search for meaning. These were reinforced by specific and precise examples from particular tradition(s).

Otherwise competent responses were limited by using only one way and its relevant example.

Low-scoring responses did not include tradition-specific examples.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*Places are locations of significance to a religious tradition, often maintaining some sort of connection to the other aspects of that tradition. In particular, places can often interconnect with religious stories or sacred texts, tying them to a time of importance for the religion. In Christianity, Bethlehem is held to be the birth place of Jesus and thus relates directly to a significant moment for the religion. In this sense, places like Bethlehem, can strengthen adherents' connection to God and allow for a greater understanding of the relationship of God to humanity, of the history of the tradition and offer support to the authenticity of the meaning of the sacred stories and texts.*

**Question 4**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	6	16	28	26	15	8	<b>3.5</b>

Definitions of the term alone were not enough. The role needed to be addressed.

Points that could have been made in various terms included:

- Sacred stories: Oral or written narratives, usually within sacred texts, that communicate and keep alive the origins and significant events and teachings of a religion and that remain sources of inspiration and education for the religion.
- Social structures: This is how a tradition organises itself so that it is able to function efficiently. It establishes the various roles and the authority associated with them. It also establishes how membership is gained, maintained or lost, and how communication is conducted within the tradition and to those outside the tradition.
- Spiritual experiences: An event, occasion or period during which a member of a religious tradition undergoes a heightened awareness of their understanding of beliefs or teachings. In bringing the members to experience God in an intense way, the spiritual experience nurtures the faith of the individual and the religious community.

Generally, students knew what the aspects were, though they did not always state the role of the aspects that was the focus of the question.

Low-scoring responses used tradition-specific examples to provide their definition of the role of the aspect.

The understanding of the aspect of social structure was too often limited to hierarchy, which does not apply to all religions.

The understanding of the aspect of sacred stories was often explained as story in general.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*Sacred Stories refer to accounts told through various literary forms, such as poems, myths, parables, epics, folklore, in which, through imaginative detail a believed truth is conveyed so that it can be remembered and understood. They are usually within sacred texts and often used in rituals as a way of keeping beliefs alive for adherents so they can live by those beliefs.*

*Social Structures refer to the way a religion is organised. This includes the various roles related to authority and duty. It also encompasses organisations within the religion for teaching its beliefs and practices and for living out its ethics through activities, such as charities, hospitals, aged care facilities, among members and in the wider community.*

*Spiritual Experiences refers to when a powerful emotion or insight is stirred affecting the understanding and/or commitment to one's perception of ultimate reality. Such spiritual experiences can bring one closer to ultimate reality, and can be the delineation between mere adherence to a tradition and having an active faith in the tradition.*

### Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	7	11	22	30	20	7	3	2.8

As well as the two aspects, at least two challenges needed to be addressed. Students might have used two examples from a religious tradition that they had studied, one for each of their selected two aspects. Or they might have referred to a number of challenges from different times in a tradition and shown why the two selected aspects have often been the focus of challenge. With either of these approaches, students could have referred to challenges from more than one religious tradition or denomination.

Careful selection and planning of information was rewarded in this question, with high-scoring responses explaining why both aspects were often involved in significant challenges of a particular tradition and using examples that involved both aspects.

Otherwise competent responses were weakened by referring to only one challenge.

Low-scoring responses focused on excessive detail in their supportive examples, demonstrating clear understanding of 'how' the selected aspects had been involved in challenges to a particular tradition, but the focus of the question was on 'why' they were involved in challenges.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*The aspect of beliefs is usually involved in significant challenges as beliefs are the substance of a religion, they are its truth narrative, giving the tradition's understanding of existential questions. There can be different understandings of a belief, that can coexist for a time until one version is given more value or promotion or questioned. In the Roman Catholic tradition of Christianity, the belief that God is Triune and that Jesus' nature is equally divine and human, were challenged in the fourth century CE by the ideas of Arius.*

*The aspect of ethics is also likely to be involved in challenges as ethical principles and related moral values flow from a tradition's beliefs and it provides the methods for ethical decision making by adherents. The elements and methods of ethics affect all within a tradition, yet may not align with ... those of society. An example of this was seen in the 1960's where the ethical teachings of the Church about the nature and purpose of sexual behaviour, procreation and marriage were challenged by the freedoms advocated by the Sexual Revolution.*

### Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	9	21	25	23	15	6	2	2.4

Students did not need to mention a religious tradition or give tradition-specific examples. However, students could have given a general response and then used tradition-specific examples to demonstrate their general points. Responses that were only tradition specific did not answer the question.

There were different responses possible according to how widely students had studied the general key knowledge points beginning each Area of Study, the traditions studied and their perspective as to how knowledge of ultimate reality and the world is gained.

Students who responded to the statement as a whole rather than its separate points took the following different, yet acceptable, approaches:

- disagreed with the entire statement and argued that religion does know about God and in great detail
- argued that we do know something and that this is continuously unfolding along with human creativity and intelligent reflection
- argued from the perspective of a cosmic whole rather than a God concept.

Some students worked with the three points in the statement, variously agreeing or disagreeing with each point. A few students even addressed the different ways of 'knowing', such as empirical knowledge, knowledge of perception, knowledge of belief or faith.

The highest-scoring responses engaged consistently with the different points of Einstein's words, showing agreement or disagreement from the perspective of religion rather than the empirical knowing of science. Such responses showed clear understanding of the difference in the roles of religion and science in society.

Low-scoring responses did not engage the points of the quotation and gave a limited definition of the role of religion. Some students read 'respond' as 'response' and so answered the question incorrectly from the perspective of Unit 4.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*Religion in many ways agrees with this statement. Most adherents will acknowledge the unknowable nature and power of their ultimate reality, whose ways are completely beyond our realm of understanding. What we do know, in the sense of believe, is found through divinely inspired texts and sacred stories and reflection upon these as we experience life. In that way we are like school children learning from books and discussing their meaning. However, as stated, there is still the possibility 'we shall know a little more than we do now', which is why there are so many religious scholars. Adherents will never stop learning and connecting with their ultimate reality through the study of texts and sacred stories and the experiences of rituals and symbols that evoke and heighten their meaning. Religious traditions would respond through encouraging the search for the knowledge of faith whilst accepting they will never know it all.*

## Section B

### Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
%	8	11	18	21	18	13	8	3	3.2

The beliefs about ultimate reality had to be selected carefully so that they showed direct connections to particular beliefs about suffering.

Students needed to give specific examples from a religious tradition (denomination) to support their claims about the relationship.

There needed to be clear identification of the selected religious tradition or denomination. Only one tradition should have been used.

Students needed to show clear understanding of what relationship means in terms of the selected beliefs.

High-scoring responses used terms that spoke of relationships. For example, they showed that the beliefs about suffering:

- were contradictory or complementary to those about ultimate reality
- logically followed particular beliefs about ultimate reality
- give further understanding of the beliefs about ultimate reality.

All points required demonstration/explanation and supporting sources were expected within the response.

Most responses identified the tradition's beliefs about ultimate reality, but often those beliefs were not the appropriate ones to show connection with the stated beliefs about suffering.

Low-scoring responses listed beliefs about ultimate reality and then about suffering, but showed no understanding of the relationship between those beliefs.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*In the Catholic tradition of Christianity ultimate reality is understood as one God who is in a triune relationship of "coequal persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit" (Catechism of Catholic Church, CCC, 232). One of the important features of God's nature is omnipotence meaning God is present everywhere at all time and in all events including human suffering. The human response to suffering is pain and sadness and a tendency to blame God, rather than thank God for the challenge of suffering-a gift from God giving the opportunity for growth. The Catholic tradition teaches adherents that "suffering should be rejoiced in as it provides hope and character" (Romans 5:3). The Catholic tradition teaches that the Lord is a God of Knowledge and would not inflict suffering without a purpose. It is also taught that God provides humanity with freedom to choose and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong and as stated by the Philosopher G W Leibniz, "suffering is the price we pay for the freedom to choose". Therefore, in Catholic teaching, individuals should trust in the omnipotent God understanding that suffering, as everything, is from God to help them.*

### Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	5	7	13	17	18	17	13	6	2	3.9

Students needed to give specific examples from a religious tradition, and to ensure the focus was on **one** belief studied in Unit 3, Area of Study 1 and its expression in rituals and ethics, showing how those expressions are intended to foster meaning.

Students should have covered in their responses that ethics expresses beliefs in principles, values and standards that show how the belief has been acted out in society and daily relationships. Whereas rituals are used to enact belief, engaging adherents in symbolic actions and words that enable them to understand the belief better and for the belief to have a more tangible/realistic meaning in their lives.

There was a number of ways to approach this response. Students answered in separate paragraphs dealing with each of the aspects named, demonstrating their expression of the selected belief. Alternatively, they interwove the two aspects, showing something of their interconnection. They also began with a general statement about the two aspects being intended to foster meaning through enactment, visualisation, verbalisation, guiding behaviour, symbolism, then use tradition-specific examples from the two aspects named in the question.

For full marks, there should have been comparability in quality of detail and understanding in what was said about each aspect, though not necessarily in length.

A general weakness in responses was the inability to state a precise belief. Often the statement of the belief was a topic or title or even a category of belief from Unit 3, Area of Study 1.

Some of the beliefs selected were too complex theologically to enable students to clearly show their expression through ritual and ethics.

While most students were able to show some expression of the belief through ritual, the understanding of the expression of the belief through ethics was not completed well. The term 'ethics' was used without identifying the particular ethical principle or moral behaviour that was the expression of the belief.

The lowest-scoring responses did not attempt to show how the expression of the belief, either in ritual or ethics, was intended to foster meaning for adherents.

Some students addressed 'fostering meaning' from the perspective of an individual rather than the intended way of the tradition.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*In modern orthodoxy Judaism the belief in God as the Lawgiver derives from the tradition that God revealed himself and his law to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt around the 1200s BCE. These 10 Commandments are seen as God's universal laws of morality, governing how humanity can lead meaningful lives. This belief that God is the Lawgiver is expressed through the ritual Tikkun Leil. During this ritual, adherents spend all night of the festival of Shavuot, delving into the teachings and texts of Judaism, often with others in synagogues to understand what it means for them that God is the lawgiver. This ritual engenders meaning for adherents' ethics as they engage in a spiritual experience of reflecting on God's laws and their meaning in their lives as individual, family and community. Pondering God's laws enables adherents to nurture and develop their understanding of how to be moral as God instructed, within their community and the wider society.*

### Question 3

Over the three parts of this question, students had to give specific examples from only **one** religious tradition (denomination). Students had to deal clearly with particular beliefs before and after the significant life experience.

If a student responded to part a. with material belonging to part b., those points were not transferred in assessing their answer to part b., unless the student clearly indicated they were aware of their mistake and that the material was to be transferred.

**Question 3a.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	5	22	42	31	2

This question required precise description of the significant experience. The task was to lay out the basic facts of the nature of the experience. There needed to be some statement that showed why the experience was significant for that person. Some historical context (dates) was needed for the person and the significant experience.

High-scoring responses provided dates and some identification of the person beyond their name.

Low-scoring responses lacked such historical context and did not explain why the experience was significant for the individual. Merely saying the person changed was not enough to explain why an experience is significant.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*At age 11 Yisrael Levine suffered the loss of his mother through a tragic car accident. Although Jewish and going to Hebrew School, Yisrael had little knowledge of the religion, and was not actively engaged in its rituals. His very basic understandings about God, death and the afterlife, gave him little support in his significant life experience of sudden death. So Yisrael reached out to the religion to find ways that might help him cope better with his loss and bereavement. His experience is recounted by Yisrael's Hebrew School teacher published by Chabad.org.*

**Question 3b.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	6	10	15	17	18	15	11	6	3	3.7

The focus of this question was the particular beliefs that were related to and impacted on by the significant life experience. They needed to be specifically stated and the connections (contrasts, similarities, extensions, elaborations, clarifications, insights, new understandings) within and between the relevant beliefs before and after the significant life experience had to be explained.

High-scoring responses clearly stated the beliefs related to the significant life experience as they were held and understood by the individual both before and after that experience.

In low-scoring responses the beliefs lacked clarity. Repeatedly saying 'his/her beliefs' without stating what they were did not answer the question. Supportive quotations from sacred texts or the person's writing were rarely used.

*The following is an example of a high-scoring response. Prior to the significant life experience of the death of his mother, Yisrael had a weak connection to the tradition and no real faith in God. Though he acknowledged the one God he had no personal relationship with God. He did not know how to pray, how to turn to his father in heaven in his great hour of need or how to seek solace in the texts, stories and rituals of Judaism. His need to understand what had happened to his mother, sent him to explore the prayers and rituals of his religion. Engaging in the prayer services opened for him the beliefs about the Creator God, the naturalness of death, the immortality of the soul and the return of the soul to the Creator God. Saying the prayers and participating in the burial ritual provided Yisrael with a way of communicating and connecting with his mother and understanding her death.*

**Question 3c.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	20	25	27	19	9	1.8

Responses had to show how the person understood the significant experience (positively or negatively, in changing ways, its meaning in their life) because they held certain religious beliefs and particular understandings of those beliefs.

This question focused on a new emphasis in the revised study design (Unit 3, Area of Study 3, key knowledge and key skill dot points 4, page 20). Student responses indicated that this key knowledge/key skill point requires more attention.

Many students misread the question and repeated statements from Question 3b., about how the individual's beliefs were influenced by the significant life experience.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*In understanding the beliefs of Judaism that the soul is immortal and hence there is resurrection of the dead in "a time that pleases the creator" (13 principles of faith), Yisrael was able to move to interpret his significant life experience in a positive way, as a divine decree of God whereby, God is benevolent and all-knowing and therefore his mother's death was part of God's plan for her and for him.*

**Question 4**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	8	12	15	14	13	12	9	5	2	1	4.1

In answering this question, students should have discussed **one** challenge that involved change to either ethics or theology or to both. Some consideration of the depth of the change should have been noted. For example:

- Was the change only in visible actions and attitudes?
- Was the change profound, influencing foundational/fundamental beliefs or principles and their related stances?

High-scoring responses noted any deeper levels of change that may have been initially resisted and took much longer to be realised. These responses addressed the complexity involved in the question.

Responses that claimed total disagreement or support with the statement were oversimplified and overgeneralised. Students who took a one-sided position towards the question had to use evidence well to support this as it was likely they were ignoring other factors. Few students used evidence well.

High-scoring responses connected their content a number of times with the contentions of the statement. Such responses also appropriately used study design terms such as 'stances' and 'supporting responses' as they discussed how the evidence related to their selected challenge supported or contradicted the statement.

Low-scoring responses included the stimulus statement without explaining how or why it related to the example they were using. Many ignored the stimulus statement.

Some of the challenges chosen were not clearly shown in their expression through aspects, ethics or theology (beliefs). Some contemporary challenges were treated as social issues, with no reference to any religious teachings or ethical principles.

Some students ignored the instruction to refer to one example and used two different examples, one for theology and another for ethics, and did not provide adequate detail for either or they wrote excessively.

Many students neglected to provide in their responses even the briefest historical context, such as a date.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*The challenge of changing traditional roles within denominations of Christianity is largely in disagreement with this statement. The challenge is one that affects both theological beliefs and ethical principles and demonstrates that achieving change in reality can be a long process, yet when the initial real change occurs a great deal actually is altered. Originating in the 1930s, this questioning of what had become the traditional gender roles in the Church, raised issues for interpretation of texts and church teachings based on particular interpretations and of justice in the church where all were baptised one in Christ, yet treated unequally. As the roles of women changed in the wider society, emphasising equality of opportunity, the Church was pressured by women within (and their male supporters) and by the wider society generally to consider the role of women within the Church. In the Church of England (England) and the Anglican Church of Australia, in the 1990s, members voted on the idea of women as priests. The vote did not pass the ordination of women. Immediately the wider community began to question the integrity of the Church and the relevance of the Church in the changed society. The account of the creation of humans, created equal in the sight of God, the teachings of St Paul "in Christ there is no longer male or female", the practices of the early church where men and women preached and lead rituals, were highlighted to show inconsistency in theological and ethical teachings and practice. The persistent pressure from within and without the Church led to reconsideration of the question of women priests and there is now ordination of both men and women. From 2014 women were accepted as candidates for the role of Bishops and subsequently as Archbishops. Things not only appeared to change but in reality did change dramatically.*

### Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	8	12	13	14	13	12	10	6	3	1	4.2

Stances and the supporting responses arising from the stances were the focus for answers to this question.

Students had to demonstrate clearly how the challenges related to the continued existence of the religious tradition. That is, in what way was the continued existence of the tradition challenged? Physically? Theologically? Ethically? At an identity level?

Many students did not recognise that the question gave them the opportunity to explore the stances and supporting responses of the tradition. Those who did recognise this wrote precise answers that kept to the focus of the question, neither over-describing the challenge nor going into detail of the impact of how the tradition dealt with the challenge. They had also chosen situations that challenged the actual existence of the tradition as it was at that time.

For many students the challenges used were inappropriate as they were not challenges to the continued existence of the particular tradition. Most of the contemporary issues used had this problem.

Whatever the challenge selected, low-scoring responses, amid excessive description of the challenge, often claimed that it affected the continued existence of the particular tradition but did not state how. This was not the focus of the question, but it did need to be stated clearly to justify the choice of challenge.

When students stated the actions and approaches of the tradition to deal with the challenge, it was done with little or no explanation. The relationship of the stances and supporting responses to the claim that the continued existence of the tradition was challenged was rarely stated.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*Within the religious tradition of Judaism, the holocaust and genocide of the Jewish people (Europe 1933-1945) posed a significant challenge to the continued existence, that is the overall survival of the religion and its adherents. The numbers of Jews were devastated by millions and faith in the significant beliefs in the Covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people, along with the belief in God as an all, powerful and just being was threatened. In response to the doubting and questioning of these beliefs and to make sense in terms of their religion of the holocaust, a number of Rabbis adopted different stances and suggested appropriate responses, though their aim was the same – to ensure the continuance of the Jewish faith. Some Rabbis, such as Rabbi, Yoel Teitelbaum (Ultra Orthodox), upheld a traditional understanding that saw the holocaust as mipnei hata'einu “a consequence of sin of the Jewish people” and affirmed that in order for Judaism to continue to exist, adherents had to respond by finding meaning in living God’s law in relationship with one another and in Jewish community and this was to be in exile, not by pre-empting the coming of the Messiah by returning to the promised land, Israel. But others such as Rabbi Richard Rubenstein (New York Reform Judaism) viewed the holocaust as devastating and thought it incomprehensible that God used the Nazis as an “instrument to fulfil his divine purpose”. Reform Rabbi Emil Fackenheim, a holocaust survivor, agreed with this view. He held that to ensure the continued existence of Judaism, adherents had to respond by maintaining all observances of Judaism so as “not to hand Hitler yet another posthumous victory” and to ensure the remembrance of all the deceased. (Quotations from Paul Forgasz lecture notes.)*