



GENERAL COMMENTS

There were numerous excellent and many competent responses to the challenges of the 2008 Religion and Society paper, which contained some difficult areas and questions that allowed varied interpretations from students. It was most encouraging to see students approaching the exam having revised their course as a whole. This enabled them to answer questions by selecting appropriate material from across their studied content. Students who chose suitable topics for their detailed study, had investigated these topics within the broad context of the interaction between religion and society and had put effort into developing their examination technique, scored well. However, this group of students is still in the minority. The following headings indicate some of the main areas still requiring attention by students and teachers.

Study Design

As mentioned in the 2007 Assessment Report, students and teachers should include study of the broader picture for the specific examples selected, which is an important component of the study design of Religion and Society. It is this broad, general understanding of the dynamic interrelationship of religion and society that is absent in the exam responses of many students. The particular religious tradition(s) studied are examples of the interaction of religion and society, part of the story of dynamic interaction. The specific examples from within the selected religious tradition(s) studied for the various Areas of Study are illustrative of a particular tradition, and do not give the whole picture of that tradition, nor all religions.

Core Beliefs

Most students were clear on the definitions of core religious beliefs, though they were not necessarily able to demonstrate an understanding of why the continuity of core beliefs is necessary to religious traditions. It was evident that students still struggled to identify core beliefs in a particular religious tradition; this was very noticeable in questions dealing with challenges to core beliefs arising out of the Areas of Study 3.2 and 3.3. Many students worked with beliefs that were not core to their selected religious tradition, although as contingent beliefs they may feature prominently in the theology and practice of the religious tradition. It is important that teachers select the core beliefs of the nominated religious tradition(s). Distinguishing clearly between the core belief and the many possible contingent beliefs arising from the core belief will assist students to more sensibly develop their arguments about why continuity is necessary for core beliefs and how this continuity is maintained. This clarification of core and contingent beliefs will also assist students to articulate what happens to the personal or group understanding of the core beliefs of their religious tradition due to the impact of a significant life experience. It was very pleasing to see many more students using theological terms correctly.

Historical Context

For most students this area remains very vague. Correct dates should be provided when students are writing about events, people, organisations, and texts from the past. A basic familiarity with at least an overview of the history of the religious tradition they are studying will help students to place the history of the event, movement or person they are studying within a broader historical context. This familiarity would also help them in their discussion of how religion and society interact, which is the broad context for all Areas of Study in Units 3 and 4.

Concept of Challenge

Students were still confused by the concept of challenge in historical terms, which is the focus of Areas of Study 3.2 and 4.1. Students' lack of knowledge of historical sequences of events and developments within the studied religious tradition caused them to give responses that were overgeneralised, vague, underdeveloped and lacking in supportive evidence. Many students still found it difficult to distinguish between internal and external challenges and factors.

Many of the topics studied for the historical challenge can be approached as both internal and external challenges to the religious tradition. However, a sufficiently clear distinction must be made so that students can avoid confusion. For example, the periods of the Reformation and the Renaissance have numerous possibilities as topics, however many students appeared to struggle to understand them due to their breadth and complexity. Many responses lacked accuracy and depth of knowledge.

Choice of Focus Topics

When choosing the topics for special detailed investigation in the Areas of Study, students' historical and theological knowledge and understanding of the chosen religious tradition should be given high priority. There are still many overly



complex topics being chosen. Responses showed that many students do not understand these complex issues. Their simplistic and unsubstantiated responses show their confusion and often contain incorrect claims.

Legibility

Students must ensure that their handwriting is legible as there were a number of scripts this year that were unclear; this makes it difficult for assessors to award marks.

Expression

This year there were many students who wrote responses which did not contain any punctuation. Incorrect spelling and poor handwriting made it very difficult for assessors to judge students' knowledge and understanding.

Many students used abbreviations and symbols to replace words. This is not generally acceptable, particularly when an abbreviation has not been introduced with the initial use of the full term.

Examination Technique

Students who were prepared in how to approach examinations presented well ordered, clearly expressed, legibly written responses. These students had learned the meanings of the key terms in the study design and used these terms correctly and effectively in their responses. They presented responses that used a wide range of their study, selecting material that best suited the question. They read questions carefully and determined what was specifically required. These students also knew how to develop an argument with appropriate use of quotations and authoritative references. They were able to develop an essay and write a report. They had obviously spent considerable time completing practice questions and past examinations, refining their technique of analysing questions, selecting appropriate material for their answer and writing the response in an examination timeframe. Such students are not yet in the majority.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Note: Student responses reproduced herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.

Section A – Short answer questions

This is predominately a generic section where students are asked to show their understanding of key terms and concepts of the study design, as per the lists below.

Key Knowledge Vocabulary

Focus	Contemporary	Application
Beliefs	Development/develop	Reformulation
Religious beliefs	Change	Effect(s)
Core beliefs	Growth	Affect(s)
Religions	Implementation/implement	Promote
Religious communities	Transform	Interplay
Religious traditions	Distinctive	Impact
Traditions	Insight	Response/respond
Ultimate reality	Resolution/resolve	Integrity
Groups	Issues	Convictions
Organisations	Social issues	Credibility
Society	Moral issues	Impetus
Communicate	Adherents	Decisive
Express	Co-exist	Challenge
Aspects (as used in the study design)	Conjunction	Multicultural
Relationship	Signify	Pluralist
Implications	Significance	Democratic
Imply	Significant	Confront
Indicate	Continuity	
Indications	Maintenance/maintained/maintain	
Interpretations/interpret	Strengthened	
Reinterpretation	Affirmation	
Current	Reaffirmation	

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Key Skills Vocabulary

Explain	Articulate	Conclude
Evaluate	Summarise	Understand
Demonstrate	Explore	Discuss
Investigate	Describe	Outline
Draw conclusions	Analyse	
Show understanding	Identify	

In Section A, the use of specific examples from the religious tradition is unnecessary unless it is specifically required by the question. In responses where such examples were used, the student's attempt at defining or explaining the term or idea was unclear and limited by the example used.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	5	16	36	42	2.2

This question covered Unit 4, Area of Study 2, 'Contemporary challenges and their impact'.

Students should have identified three different ways that religious traditions respond, and not simply provide a restatement of the same way of responding.

Ways that religious traditions respond include:

- discussion, debate, research, questioning, evaluation, re-evaluation
- invoking prayer – individually or as community witness
- develop a position, position papers, public statements, demonstrations
- support, approve, condemn or argue against
- use of the media
- refrain from comment and/or action
- social action to address the problem
- embrace change
- major gatherings for debate, for example, conferences and councils.

Students did not need to give an example in their response.

Following are examples of high-scoring student responses.

Example 1

Religious traditions can respond to moral issues by rejecting the issue completely, drawing their understanding from the literal elucidation of scripture. This rigid response can be highlighted by evangelical and Catholic responses to homosexuality as wrong according to the Bible.

Example 2

Religious traditions may respond to issues by adapting ancient understandings to modern concepts and come to response that advocates a less than clear line of approach of accepting and dealing with moral issues, such as the Uniting Church being open to homosexuality through the understanding of the new concept of sexual orientation.

Example 3

Religious traditions can also respond by ignoring or staying completely silent on the moral issue, leaving it to individuals.

Example 4

Religious traditions respond to major social and moral issues with the formation of organisations or groups that promote the tradition's vision to society. Traditions may also respond by adapting the beliefs or ethics in order to accommodate for social and moral change in society. Thirdly traditions respond by protest, media publication or other community initiative from the adherents of the tradition in order to confront the issue.

Example 5

Firstly they can evaluate the argument or various arguments weighing up consequences and impacts upon the tradition. Then they may choose to adapt to this issue implementing change or reformation or reject the issue acting to strengthen and maintain. Traditions can also simply disregard the issue without evaluating immediately acting to assert and maintain the faith's beliefs.



Example 6

Religious traditions can respond to contemporary issues by reinterpreting its beliefs so that they align with societal values. Conversely, traditions may staunchly maintain their beliefs rejecting the need for change. Responding to social issues, adherents may even abandon those specific beliefs in favour of societal values.

Example 7

Firstly when challenged by pressure by forces with the tradition, traditions may respond by justifying the truth and value of their core beliefs. Secondly when challenged externally religious traditions may respond by resisting an attack on the tradition's existence and or relevance in society in order to protect and preserve the tradition. Thirdly a tradition may respond to a challenge from external forces by engaging in a mutually enriching conversation to reach a higher viewpoint of truth and value.

Example 8

Traditions may undertake public discourses, debates or forums in the community addressing the issue. They may liaise and cooperate with the government concerning the matter so as to endeavour to influence legislation concerning it. Traditions may also use media such as magazines as a means of addressing adherents of the tradition so as to promote a shared stance on the matter amongst all adherents.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	13	26	28	19	11	2.8

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 2, 'Continuity and maintenance of religious beliefs'.

An accurate understanding of core religious beliefs should have been obvious within the explanation. Some of the following points should have been made about continuity of core religious beliefs.

- basis, centre and foundation of religious tradition
- gives religious tradition its distinctive identity
- source of other beliefs, teachings, ethical principles, moral teachings
- gives stability, certainty, confidence and security to the believers
- gives credibility to the tradition's claims
- provides the validity, reason and means of other aspects/dimensions of religion, which are based on the core religious beliefs
- everything is built around the core beliefs

Some students included points about the various ways of expression and levels of understanding changing over time. However, essentially the core beliefs stay constant to ensure the authentic identity and integrity of the religious tradition.

Following examples of high-scoring student responses.

Example 1

Core religious beliefs are held as a privileged moment of insight into original religious experience and define the religious tradition itself. Consequently, it is essential for religious traditions to find continuity in their core beliefs in order for them to remain insightful to the original experience and relevant to the community of the tradition. Core religious beliefs outline the necessary criteria, which is required for membership of a religious tradition and cannot be altered without altering the tradition. They must maintain continuity to remain insightful, relevant and effective in deepening an understanding of the faith response and continue to offer meaning to individuals striving to perfect their understanding of the wonder and mystery found in an experience of the transcendent.

Example 2

Core religious beliefs form the base on which an entire religion is premised. Therefore, if they are not maintained the continuity of a tradition may be jeopardized or perhaps even cease to exist. Further as consequential beliefs stem from these core values failure to ensure the continuity of such beliefs will render the contingent beliefs redundant having disastrous ramifications for a tradition as it has no substance or guidance. Further continuity is necessary so as to ensure that the tradition is maintains its uniqueness and is not too heavily influenced by external factors.

Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	0	6	20	26	23	15	9	3.5

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 3, 'Life experience and religious belief'.



Responses needed to use two different life experiences from the box. If the same life experience was used for both answers, then no mark was given for that part of the question.

The belief needed to be core for the religious tradition chosen. If it was not a core belief, no mark was given for that part of the question. The next part of the question could receive only two marks out of a possible four and only if what was said was relevant to the belief that was stated.

The core belief could be the same for both parts of the question and should have been stated in clear, correct theology.

Some of the positive influences on understanding of the core religious belief that could be referred to include:

- deepening
- broadening
- enlightening
- enhancing
- changing attitudes
- increasing commitment
- simplifying
- firming
- encouraging/supporting in belief or adherence
- affirming
- making stronger
- creating new possibilities
- making doubt disappear
- creating enthusiasm to live the belief
- making the mystery in belief acceptable
- increasing/creating awareness of the value/meaning of the belief in life.

Following are examples of high-scoring student responses.

Example 1

Life experience - Love

Related core religious belief – The Roman Catholic belief in God as Father, Creator, Almighty.

Positive understanding – An experience of love for an individual confirms the individual's belief that God as the sole source of all that is seen and unseen unites everything in his divine plan of sheer love. An experience of love would reaffirm the original insight as the individual recognizes that in living a life of total and perfect giving of oneself they may share in the love that is God.

Example 2

Life experience - Death

Related core religious belief – Muslim belief in the afterlife, for example Islamic belief in Paradise where one becomes closer to God.

Positive understanding – The life experience of death can positively advance understanding of life after death by confirming the idea that one is in a better place after death. In Islam, Muslims are comforted by the fact that when a pious Muslim dies they may enter Paradise and become closer to Allah. This can positively affect the understanding of the importance of being close to Allah and allows death to be understood as a positive experience.

Example 3

Life experience - Wonder

Related core religious belief – The belief in a higher being and the nature of the Christian God being omnipotent and omnipresent.

Positive understanding – The life experience of wonder may positively impact and encourage belief in individuals, as this feeling of Numinous (wonder and a certain shrinking) can be an experience that resembles revelation when one experiences wonder they can have a feeling that there is a presence a lot larger than themselves, thus encouraging a belief in an omnipresent God. When one experiences wonder towards the world this often leads people to believe in a higher being through the teleological argument as one is so amazed and mystified by the intrinsic design of the world they are ultimately encouraged to come to a positive understanding of omnipotent Creator and higher being.



Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	9	23	27	22	12	7	3.3

Some of the negative influences on understanding of the core religious belief that could be referred to included (but were not limited to):

- diffusing
- confusing
- clashing
- contradicting
- lessening
- confounding
- reducing
- clouding, leading to rejection
- creating doubt,
- misunderstanding,
- overemphasis, getting out of proportion or perspective.

Example 1

Following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

Life experience – The life experience of suffering.

Related core religious belief – The belief in Judaism of Divine Retribution, contingent to the core belief of Ethical Monotheism.

Negative understanding – The life experience may negatively affect the understanding of Ethical Monotheism in Judaism by causing someone to believe that God is not just, merciful, righteous, omnipotent and benevolent if He were to inflict suffering on man for no apparent reason.

Section B – Extended response questions

Students need to read the entire question before they begin their response. They need to stop writing everything they know related to a topic. Instead they need to carefully select the knowledge that is most appropriate to include in response to the particular question. By paying close attention to the whole question, students will see that they are building a detailed response in parts. Students also need to understand what the instructional terms require so that their responses can be to the point of the question.

Section B – Extended response questions, require the use of evidence. Most students demonstrated this at a superficial level in their responses.

Question 1

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 3, ‘Life experience and religious beliefs’.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	2	13	30	55	2.4

This question is meant to focus on historical challenges. The three challenges listed should have been specific events, situations, theories and teachings. They should have been listed so the nature of the challenge and its historical period was clear.

Example 1 – Question 1a.

Internal – During the Patristic period (100-451) Christianity was faced with many internal challenges to core beliefs and understandings such as Arianism, Nestorianism and Gnosticism.

External – Galileo’s heliocentric theory (1564-1634) posed challenge to the Christian understanding that ‘the earth is truly the spiritual centre of the universe’.

External – Darwin’s evolutionary theory posed explicit challenge to Christianity’s understanding of human origin.

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Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	8	29	63	1.6

This question refers to the eight aspects of religion listed in the study design which are:

- beliefs
- myths and other stories
- sacred texts and other religious literature
- rituals
- symbols
- social structures
- oral or written codes of behaviour
- religious experience and spirituality.

Students needed to use only one aspect when answering the question.

Example 1 – Question 1b.

*Darwin's theory of evolution outlines in *Origins of Species* (1859) posed explicit challenge to a number of aspects of traditional Christian teaching, particularly the core belief in the creation and the distinctive nature of humans as they are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26).*

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	17	28	23	24	2.4

The description of the aspect given in Question 1b. needed to be specific and related to the aspect directly in this question. For example, if the aspect was belief, then students needed to describe the theology of the belief or the understanding or observance of the belief.

Example 1 – Question 1c.

Firstly Darwin's theory challenged the understanding that God made the world as it is, as it argued that species developed after millions of years through the process of natural selection, thus the literal interpretation of the story of Genesis could no longer coincide and had to be interpreted as a myth or metaphor. Furthermore Darwin's theory explained that humans were not distinct as 'man with all his noble qualities still bears in his bodily frame the stamp of his lowly origin'. Thus it challenged the Church's teaching that humans were above the natural order and called up many unprecedented questions such as if man is from 'lowly form' then do animals have souls and if humans are an evolving species was Jesus evolving? Also it particularly challenged theologians as they now posed the question 'when was the evolving man given a soul?'

Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	7	11	21	24	21	17	2.9

The responses of the religious tradition could have been stated in summary detail, presented in categories or types of responses rather than a detailed description of individual responses. Either or both of these approaches were accepted.

Example 1 – Question 1d.

There was a wide variety of responses to the challenge of Darwinism. The first official response was from the German Church Council of Cologne (1860) which condemned the theory stating 'our parents were immediately formed by God' and that evolutionary theory 'opposed sacred scripture and faith'. This response of condemnation has further been adapted in the neo orthodox approach which dismisses evolutionary theory as 'science and theology are independent and distinct ways of approaching reality' (Langon Giley). The Vatican stayed silent which was perceived as condemning the theory along with many Christian factions supporting the 'young earth creation' approach which places emphasis on the Bible as factual, this responded by dismissing the theory. Other Christian responses such as liberal Protestant communities accepted evolutionary theory of explaining the how of creation and responded through the understandings of 'intelligent design' and 'evolutionary theism' advocated by William Paley and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	13	12	17	20	18	11	9	2.9



Effects of the responses internally (within the selected religious tradition) could have included points about the tradition becoming unified, engaging in ongoing discussion, consolidation of an aspect of the tradition, or the development of a split into factions, new conflict arising, or partial or complete rejection of the tradition by members.

Effects of the responses externally (in the wider society and/or other religious communities) could have included points about the possibility of there being no effect on the wider society and/or on other religious communities. If so, students should have offered some reasoning. The effects of the responses of the tradition that might be observed are that the responses were irrelevant and ignored, outsiders might be unaware of the tradition's responses or they might admire, support and cooperate with the tradition's response, or they might ridicule the tradition, subject the tradition or its members to harassment, or the tradition could be subjected to wider consultation processes.

Example 1 – Question 1e.

Effects of the response internally

- Led to a splintering within the Church over ideas that were convergent or incompatible with the Faith
- Led to Catholic Dominican Leroy publishing a book (1888) supporting the theory. The book created much internal debate.
- Theologian Fontana condemned Leroy stating he 'should be seriously warned and repressed' thus furthering the divide between theologians.

Effects of the responses externally

- Led to widening of the gap between science and religion as many perceived the two as incompatible
- Led to the Church of England in 2008 to formally apologise for the response of misunderstanding and causing anti-evolutionary fervor. Thus attempting to bridge the gap between science and religion.
- Did not affect other religious communities' relationship as in England Christianity was the predominant religion in the time of Darwin's theory.'

Example 2

1a.

The death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 and beginning of the era of the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs ended the line of prophetic leaders.

The Muslim terrorist attacks on the USA in 2001 challenged the unity amongst Muslims and the way in which they were perceived by society.

The triumph of the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) meant a triumph of corrupt, dynastic rule of the Islamic empire.

1b.

The triumph of the Umayyad dynasty in 661CE challenged the unity amongst the umma (Muslim community) and the social structure of Islam was changed.

1c.

The unity of the umma was challenged because many Muslims did not agree with the deviation from Islamic teachings shown by the Umayyad rulers. Consequently they began to withdraw from society. The social structure of Islam was challenged because the capital of Islam was moved from the holy city Mecca to Damascus in Syria. Also the mosque lost its pivotal role in the life of the community and became a place solely for ritualistic worship.

1d.

Islam responded to the challenged posed by the corrupt Umayyad rulers with a more intuitive branch of Islam that focused solely on achieving closeness with Allah. This branch of Islam is known as Sufism. Sufism began to take form as a movement when the leadership of the umma began to deviate from Islam ethics and beliefs. Sufis believe that prophets including Muhammad practiced abstinence and self-denials, so Sufis became ascetic meaning that they withdrew from society. They turned their attention to gaining knowledge spiritual guidance and looseness to Allah.

1e.

Effects of the response internally:

- The Sufis were perceived by the rest of the umma, as men who saw themselves as an elite group.
- The reflection of Tawhid (unity and oneness) was compromised, as there was division in the umma.
- Many Muslims believed that Sufism challenged the relationship with and separation between humankind and God, as Sufis believed that one could become very close to God in this lifetime not only in Paradise.

Effects of the responses externally

- Sufism attracted more spiritual types and led to greater conversion to Islam.
- Islam was perceived by the wider society as a more spiritual religious tradition due to the nature of Sufism.



- *Islam was seen to be less united as three main branches of Islam now existed.*

Example 3

1a.

The challenge of the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945 challenged the belief in a Jewish covenant.

The challenge of the destruction of the Temple in 70CE challenged the sacrificial expression of the belief in God.

The challenge of the Greek invasion of Judea in the second century BCE challenged the very continuity of the Jewish tradition.

1b.

The Holocaust – in the wake of the atrocities the traditional belief in the inherent chosenness of the covenantal relationship between G-d and the Jews was challenged as well as traditional theologies.

1c.

The covenant between G-d and the Jews stipulated that as long as the Jews followed G-d's commandments. He would look after them. However, the utter incomprehensibility of the holocaust challenged this core belief leading adherents to question the validity of the covenant. Further Judaism maintains the belief in a compassionate and kind G-d. The massacre of six million Jews challenged this core belief as many Jews questioned their faith.

1d.

The holocaust involved a schism in Judaism in regards to the covenant. Some called for a reconsideration of the relationship. Irving Greenberg an orthodox Rabbi stated that all the old truths certainties and obligations have been destroyed by the holocaust. Conversely others such as Rabbi Joel Twifelbaum maintained that to revise the original covenant would be preposterous citing that the Jews had incurred the wrath of G-g for failing to adhere to traditional belief in the messianic era.

1e.

Effects of the response internally:

- *Engendered disharmony as some claimed that the holocaust demanded a reconsideration of core beliefs whilst others disagreed.*
- *This unrest impacted badly on the ambience within the tradition.*
- *Emphasis on Zachor (remember). Irrespective of the arguments, all adherents maintain the importance of perpetuating the memory of the deceased.*

Effects of the responses externally

- *Compelled religions inherently intolerant of Judaism to reassess behaviour to Judaism.*
- *The promulgation of Nostra Aetate in 1965 by Christians took enormous strides to overcome millennia of Christian hatred towards Jews.*
- *Many communities see the importance of commemorating the holocaust to ensure it doesn't happen again.*

Question 2

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 2, 'Continuity and maintenance of religious beliefs', and Unit 3, Area of Study 1, 'Meaning in religious traditions'.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	4	24	72	1.7

The following is the definition for core religious beliefs to be used in relation to the study design. 'Core' religious beliefs are those that are central in the belief system of a specific religious tradition and from which other (non-core) religious beliefs are directly or indirectly derived. The 'core' religious beliefs of any religious tradition are the theological foundation upon which that tradition establishes its uniqueness. Though expressed variously by students the substance of the definition should have been within responses.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	9	19	22	22	14	11	3.4

The nominated belief must have been a core religious belief for the studied religious tradition and the theological details of the core belief needed to be explained. Responses should have also explained what is meant by the core belief and perhaps how it is understood. This may have involved some consequent beliefs. Some core beliefs might have needed the addition of changed interpretations or understandings in the explanation.



Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	9	5	8	8	9	7	10	9	10	8	8	3	5	5.7

The response should have been an outline of strategies, techniques, methods used by the religious tradition to ensure the continuity of the core belief. Students had the opportunity to use the aspects of consequent beliefs, rituals, symbols, and writings.

Students could choose to refer to internal or external factors, or both.

The question intended that students would use the same core belief as outlined in Question 2b. However, if another core belief was used here it was acceptable.

Example 1

2a.

Core beliefs are those central to a religious tradition and from which non-core beliefs are directly or indirectly derived. Core beliefs are the theological or metaphysical foundation upon which a tradition establishes its uniqueness.

2b.

The core belief of prophethood (risalah) has been continued and maintained throughout the history of Islam. Belief in prophethood is central to Islam as prophets are a means through which Allah (God) has provided humankind with guidance. The death of the prophethood Muhammad in 632CE challenged the continuity of this belief as it meant an end to the line of prophets. The belief in prophetic leadership of the umma (Muslim community) underwent a process of reaffirmation and reformulation in order to sustain the core belief of prophethood.

2c.

The internal factor of the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632CE was a shock to the umma (Muslim community) and caused differing opinions amongst Muslims on who should lead the expanding Islamic empire. One group, the Shi'ite, held the view that leadership of the umma should remain with the descendents of Muhammad through his cousin Ali. For the Shi'ite, the belief that prophets are a means through which spiritual guidance and knowledge from God can be obtained was reaffirmed after the death of Muhammad. On the other hand, the Sunni accepted that prophethood had come to an end and instead recognized political, rather than spiritual leaders of the umma. For the Sunni, while belief in prophethood remained central, the belief concerning leadership of the umma was reformulated. The influence of the expression of prophethood for the Shi'ite has led them to venerate the descendents of Muhammad and regard them as spiritually guided like the prophets. One type of Shi'ite Islam, the Twelvers, still await the return of the twelfth descendent, known as an imam, who disappeared from the vision of humankind. The twelfth imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, is said to have passed into a state of Occulation. In Sunni Islam there is no central authority, but the belief in prophethood remains central.

Example 2

The following example is knowledgeable and sound, despite some circular explanation and the absence of a timeframe for the periods explained in Question 2c.

2a.

Core religious belief is a fundamental belief that creates understanding for other beliefs and essential in shaping understanding for that religion.

2b.

In the Christian tradition the core belief in the Trinity is essential and while it has been challenged throughout history has been sustained to provide essential understandings for followers. The core belief that God exists as three persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and yet all are fully God and all are 'of the same substance' (Nicene Creed) and are equal has been sustained the belief is supported by (John 1:1 which states 'in the beginning there was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God' highlighting how each entity is equal and that the Son was not made by the Father as all are equal.

2c.

During the Patristic period the external factor of Emperor Constantine converting to Christianity influenced Christianity as new core beliefs and understandings were allowed to be openly debated and discussed, such as the nature of the Trinity. This allowed for rigorous internal debate of Christian core beliefs by theologians which led them to outline crucial understandings to ensure the sustaining, continuity and maintenance of core belief such as the Trinity. The internal challenge of Arius a bishop from fourth century influenced this core belief as he argued that the Son was not of the same substance as the father stating 'there was when he was not.' This challenge caused major debate and led to Athanasius bishop of Alexandria to oppose his view saying if Jesus was not God and only God can save then how can Jesus redeem humanity? And reconcile us to God? (Romans 5:10) Athanasius also argued if Jesus was not equal to God then people praying to Jesus were committing idolatry. To counter the widening rift within the Church, the Emperor convened the Nicaea Council (325CE) which led to deeming Arius's views as heretical and affirming the equality of the Trinity and eventually through the creation of the Nicene Creed which clearly allows people to



express the belief that Jesus is ‘Homoousion- of the same substance’ through reciting the creed. Thus the internal and external factors of the Patristic period highly influenced the expression of the core belief in the Trinity as the understandings are still maintained and continued on the Nicene Creed today.

Example 3

2a.

A core religious belief is one that is at the heart of a religion and the tradition would cease to exist without it. Imperative to continuity other beliefs stem from it as it encapsulates the soul of the tradition.

2b.

Judaism upholds the belief that G-d gifted the Jews with a dual Torah, (Torah She Bichtar – written Torah and Torah She Bealpeh – oral Torah). The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was according to scholar David Goldberg ‘proof of G-d’s special covenant with Israel and confirmation of the original promise He made to Abraham’. The significance of such an event cannot be underestimated as it is here that a nomadic group of people, were transformed into a united nation. This core belief in Revelation has been sustained throughout the history of the tradition and its impact, states writer Adin Steinsaltz, ‘continues to reverberate today’.

2c.

Perhaps the most significant external factor in influencing the expression of the belief in revelation was the destruction of the Temple in 70CE. Prior to the destruction of the Temple Jewish life was characterised by adherence to the letter of the written law through the ritual sacrificial worship at the Temple, ‘the cycle of holy time was marked by the ritual of sacrifice’ (Jacob Nuesner). And thus as the temple was destroyed Jews were unable to express the belief in revelation. Resilient actions by the Rabbis subsequently moved the centre of Jewish life from the temple to a learning academy, yeshiva. Following considerable theological analysis the Rabbis reformulated the belief in revelation affecting change in its expression deeming that G-d revealed both a written and an oral Torah, ‘that the written law ought to be interpreted every generation through the oral law’, thus developing Halacha (Jewish Law), a code of conduct which through living within Halachaic constraints enabled Jews to express the belief in revelation. Moreover, the Rabbis determined that Shovvon previously a harvest festival and agricultural ritual commemorated the day that Jews received Torah thus developing a formal ritual of expression.

Section C – Essays and report questions

Section C of the examination involves analysis, discussion, illustrative quotations, supportive evidence and detailed addressing of the question. Students may choose to write their response in the form of an essay or a report but all of the above must be addressed.

Students’ report and essay writing technique should be well established before the examination as a part of their preparation. Students may be challenged by questions in this section that offer the possibility of responding from a number of studied areas, such as Question 3.

Of concern was the absence of critical thinking in student responses. Student responses needed to outline the positives as well as be able to acknowledge inadequacies, mistakes or even wrongs on the part of the tradition studied in relation to specific topics. Responses of this type were rare. For most students this is the weakest part of the exam. Full marks could only be given for answering questions directly and correctly. Answering questions wrongly or ignoring the focus of the question loses marks even when a response may be very knowledgeable and competently written.

Essay/Report

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	2	0	1	1	2	4	4	4	6	6	8	7	10	9	9	7	6	4	4	2	2	11.5

Question 1–3

Marks	0	1	2	3
%	1	41	17	41

Question 1

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 1, ‘Meaning in Religious Traditions’.

Students should have stated clearly the religious tradition or traditions they intended to use in their response. If they planned to refer to a particular branch or denomination of the religious tradition(s) this should also have been clearly stated. Reiterating this identification of the religious tradition or its denomination throughout their essay or report assists the clarity and the connectedness of the response.



Students were required to give a clear, straightforward account of the core beliefs and the associated beliefs of the selected religious tradition(s) about a supreme being or the concept of ultimate reality. Then students needed to develop an explanation of the connections between these beliefs and the other areas of belief listed.

This was a theological question so the detail and accuracy of the theology was important. Students should have included a detailed statement of the beliefs and a clear explanation of the connection between them. The question's three dot points could have been woven into the response. Better responses noted the interconnections of the beliefs with the question's three dot points, as well as with the beliefs about a supreme being or ultimate reality.

Following are extracts from successful essays. These responses demonstrate thorough knowledge of the core and extended beliefs of the selected religious tradition(s) or denomination(s). The inclusion of more thorough quotations and textual references would have enhanced some of these responses.

Example 1

Report

The nature and purpose of human life

The relationship between humanity and the rest of the world

The way members of the tradition should live their lives.

This response does everything required by the question in an articulate manner a little too concise at times when further detail and text reference or quotation would have improved the explanation. The response would also have benefited from a conclusion that tied together the main points about God that lead the tradition to the understandings explained under the various report headings. Following is the final section of the report.

The way members of the tradition should live their lives.

The Midrashim from post biblical theology proclaim that God created man as a test, to see if a being with free will can choose to act in a moral way, when given sinning would be the easiest way to act. To test this theory, God bestowed the Seven Noahide Laws onto Noah, for all of humanity as a moral code and the way one should lead their lives. These are basic moral guidelines for life individuals should act on these laws out of choice rather than obligation performing mitzvoth-good deeds through ethical monotheism. As God is incorporeal, ethical monotheism ascribes virtuous aspects onto God as an ethical way in which one should lead their life; following God's attributes. He is viewed as a loving and compassionate and personal God always acting for the best of humanity, as recited every morning that he is 'my king,...my redeemer' (Adon Olam) and is given thanks for all the positive encounters one has throughout the day. However Jews perceive themselves as having additional obligations in how they should act, being an 'or' a light to pave the moral pathway for the rest of the nations, through adherence to the Ten Commandments bestowed upon Jews at Mount Sinai. The first five commandments signify how man should lead his life and relationship with God, while the last five commandments are Guidelines for how man should act to humanity. ... All of humanity should live their lives emulating God's positive attributes, performing mitzvoth and acting morally when given the option of sinning.

People should lead their lives through the belief in Tikkun Olam and Tikkun Adam (the repairing of the world and the repairing of man) by contributing to charities, acting in a caring and compassionate manner towards each and preserving wildlife and the ecosystem. When the repairing has been completed, a messianic age will adorn man changing everyone's lifestyle to be of a peaceful nature where 'sheep shall lie with lions' and peace will forever be on this earth.

Example 2

The following example is in a more complete report format, including a table of contents and a conclusion. The introduction and conclusion are shown here.

Introduction

In the Christian tradition, ultimate reality is a God who is transcendent and immanent, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. This God is Three Persons in One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, coequal, coeternal and consubstantial. Like any religion, Christianity insists that believers have a spiritual capacity (going beyond the limitations of flesh and blood), which allows believers to have an intimate relationship with the ultimate reality, the Triune Godhead. This insistence means that religious beliefs greatly affect believers and their consciences. Religion gives meaning and purpose to human existence and leads to implications in the way that believers act, and their relationship with the natural world and other believers.

Conclusion

The Christian beliefs in Ultimate Reality shape the understanding of believers in their purpose in life and the way they should carry out their lives. The Church, as the Body of Christ continues to clarify these beliefs through ritual, song, symbol and art and



the faith hope and love (1Cor 13:13) of their God guides believers in Communion to live out the implications of their beliefs in relationship to the rest of the world.'

Example 3

Following is a section from another high quality response in report form, although it lacked the table of contents and had a largely irrelevant introduction.

Nature and Purpose of Human Life

Muslims believe that Allah is responsible for the creation of all that exists, and that he has not created anything without purpose. Muslims view the nature and purpose of their lives is to submit fully to the will of Allah. This is emphasized in the translation of the words Islam and Muslim. Islam means peace and submission and a Muslim is one who submits. Allah stipulates that Muslims can find peace through submission and unity. Belief in Tawhid (unity and oneness) involves unity and equality both within the Umma (worldwide Muslim community) and the rest of the world. The importance of unity and equality amongst humanity is demonstrated in the ritual of Salat (prayer). Muslims pray five times a day facing in the direction of Mecca the holy city. Muslims pray in union shoulder to shoulder which emphasizes their unity and equality under Allah. All Muslims are united by their separation from Allah and the primary purpose of their lives is to submit to Allah's will and become as close to him as possible during their lives and they should live in peace and harmony with humanity and the rest of the world.

Example 4

The following sections from another response shows that the student has attempted to explore the big picture components of the VCE Religion and Society Study Design, a perspective that is often missing from student responses.

Ultimate reality is the final viewpoint that holds all the answers to human existence. It is seen as the 'radical' other that gives meaning, value and purpose for the human person – ultimately driving humanity's natural instinct of wanting to know everything about everything. This 'wonder' of the human person in wanting to know everything about everything acknowledges that humanity does not have all the answers and at times he/she lives in imperfect situation (for human knowledge is only ever probable, never certain). However wonderment in searching for ultimate reality also acknowledges that the human person searches for what those answers may be and also searches for the perfect 'radical other'.

The role of religion is to answer questions unrestricted to human reason and to profess the meaning and purpose of the human person in accordance to the 'radical other'. It is the realm of faith proper. For the Roman Catholic believer it is the belief in God that shapes the meaning and value of his/her life. The belief in God states that God is the one source of all human existence and the supernatural realm. That God is Father and cares for humankind in a loving and sacrificial way. That God is Almighty in knowing and judgement and is unconditioned. And that God is creator of all existence which is seen as a gift expressing that totality of God's love.

The belief I God states that the nature and purpose of the human person is essentially to love. As God created humankind in the image and likeness of himself, the Catholic is called to care and love all creation...

The Catholic belief in God in relation to humanity's relationship to the rest of the world is expressed through the existential gap 'What is' and 'What should be.' ...As the Catholic answers the 'ethical imperative, What must I do to be?', through belief in God – the Catholic comes to love all creation and the rest of the world – which is seen as a witness of God's love.

Question 2

This question covered Unit 4, Area of Study 1, 'Historical challenges to religious traditions', Unit 4 Area of Study 2, 'Contemporary challenges and their impact', and Unit 3, Area of Study 2, 'Continuity and maintenance of religious beliefs'.

The best responses consistently discussed the statement of the question and there were many parts to the statement to consider such as:

- the concept of perfection
- the concept of isolation
- the concept of perfect isolation
- what does it mean to stand alone?
- can religion ever stand alone?
- is there a need to stand alone in some sense even if it is not in perfect isolation?
- what does it mean to absorb?
- in what way would a religion absorb different ideas or influences?
- in what way would a religion be transformed?
- how does a religion show that an idea or influence is unwelcome?



- how does a religion not acknowledge an idea or influence?

Not all of these parts of the statement needed to be addressed for a successful response.

Students are expected to show that they have a broad knowledge of the religious tradition(s) they have studied. They should be able to refer to a few instances throughout the life of the religion(s), both historical and contemporary, even though they may use only one example in greater detail.

Example 1

While more precise analysis and consistent reference to the statement would have enhanced this response, it is a high quality response that addresses all of the relevant examination criteria.

In the context of the Catholic Christian tradition the subject statement rings true for many events and developments. From its beginning separation from Judaism to Vatican II, it has responded always as it thought most appropriate. Specifically the Industrial revolution posed one of the greatest challenges ever faced by religious traditions.

This was as drastic a change in the world that had ever been seen and the CTC could not continue unchanged.

The following conclusion ably summarises the argument developed in the body of the response.

The Industrial Revolution was not a change of alliance from power to the people. It was a refocusing of the Church's mission from the poor to their situation. This was not as easy process and the people lost faith in the Church as a governing body, but its response and dedication of its members gave a moral authority that became well deserved. Its integration thorough a changing society influenced it to become a better force for those which its mission from Jesus was meant to focus: the poor, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to proclaim glad tidings to the poor.' (Luke 4:17)

Example 2

The following response addresses a number of the nuances in the statement through treating in detail the content studied for Unit 4, Area of Study 2. While the response is based on the Christian Religion, the student refers to the Catholic and to the Anglican Christian traditions and also approaches the question from a number of perspectives within the traditions of the Christian religion.

Religion does not stand alone, as it is inextricably intertwined and imbedded within society. Throughout the ages traditions are confronted by new ideas and influences, often they are transformed and changed ads a result of societal influences. However, Religions have also managed to maintain a sense of continuity and tradition that throughout the history has stayed steadfastly the same, no heeding to the ever-changing and rapidly developing ideas of society. The various responses to the contemporary issue of abortion highlight how some religious factions absorb and transform in light of society influences while others are able to stand unchanged in their approach and responses. The new Decriminalisation Abortion Bill passed in Victoria 10th October 2008 highlights how traditions are forced to acknowledge and absorb new ideas however are not necessarily influenced or transformed...

The official Catholic response to abortion however seemingly stands almost alone as in Australian society 76% of Australian Catholics support a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy. The new Decriminalisation Bill of Abortion passed through Parliament highlights Australia's increasing acceptance of abortion with many recognizing many moral complexities surrounding the unique situation of abortion and even adopting a gradualist approach to the personhood of the foetus. Theologian Karl Rahner argues the 'embryo should be considered human material without being treated as a full human person.' However the official Catholic tradition has not been influenced by these new concepts of 'gradually acquiring personhood' and to no extent has been transformed on their position, is arguing the human should be treated as a full human person from the moment of conception (Pope John XXIII).

The Australian Anglican response to abortion highlights how in some cases religions do transform by different ideas and influences. Many Anglicans approach the issue on the understanding that 'an absolutist anti abortion stance cannot lay claim to biblical warrant' (Archdeacon Alison Taylor), thus are open to absorbing new ideas to help them approach the moral issue. The Anglican Taskforce and submission to the Law Reform inquiry into the Law of Abortion supported the Decriminalisation Bill, by approaching the issue with a gradualist approach. The Anglican Taskforce drew from the influences and ideas of prominent theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo who advocated the gradualist position. The Anglicans were also influenced by Philosophy as Aristotle arguably endorsed their position by stating that 'when couples have children in excess let abortion be procured before sense of life has begun.' (Politics 7:16) Thus these influences highlight how some traditions are influenced and transformed by ideas throughout history.

Example 3



The following introduction to an excellent response consistently discusses many of the statement's claims, referring to many different examples from the history of the Roman Catholic Christian tradition.

Religious traditions do not stand alone completely autonomous from society. Instead, they are organisations which as active members and participants in society are challenged by ideas and influences from factors both within the traditions and those outside of them. When presented with different ideas and influences to their own religious traditions may respond by welcoming and acknowledging them or choosing to not do so. Whether or not they are recognized these presentations of ideas and influences will always undoubtedly have some effect on the tradition, as they will be transformed either positively, or negatively by them. The Roman Catholic Tradition has been presented with different ideas and influences throughout its two thousand year history, many of which have been rejected and ignore; many of which have been acknowledged and welcomed. On all occasions however these views some of which are completely antithetical to the views, beliefs and ideals of the Roman Catholic Tradition have affected the tradition in some manner.

The response then discussed the statement through the examples of first century Roman persecutions of the early Christians, transforming the nature of the religious tradition. This was followed with the example of how the next few centuries again saw the tradition transformed as it absorbed the ideas and influences of the surrounding Hellenistic society.

The student then explored the statement through the examples of the changing perception of the human person during the early part of the twentieth century, especially the influences of the World Wars, and the growth of Communism, especially as experienced within Poland.

Contemporary examples followed with a discussion of the influence of ethical pluralism.

The student's conclusion is justified by the supported points in the response.

As the Roman Catholic tradition demonstrates, religions exist in society and as a part of society. They are unable to stand alone in perfect isolation and instead must respond with resistance and engagement to the challenges presented to them by different ideas and influences. These challenges will ultimately transform the tradition in some way as the Roman Catholic tradition has been in the past and in contemporary setting.

Question 3

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 3, 'Life experience and religious beliefs'.

The best responses identified the religious tradition(s) they selected in the introduction to their response and referred to the tradition(s) consistently throughout. These responses also identified the relevant core religious beliefs clearly and with theological accuracy. They discussed how these core religious beliefs were understood by the person or group before their significant life experience and explained the significant life experience. The explanation needed to address the nature of the experience, and not simply give descriptive detail.

The response needed to explain the ways in which the person or group's understanding of the core religious belief was changed because of the experience. These changes may have been positive or negative and the response should have contained theological explanation, not just vague claims of the person or group's understanding being strengthened or confused, or that they rejected the belief.

Students needed to provide a context for what happened to the person or group's understanding of their religious belief. So the belief both before and after the significant experience needed to be explained in theological terms not just named.

The statement(s) chosen had to be worked with at the different points of development of the response.

The statement(s) needs to be discussed – that is, unpacked within the context of the essay or report, not only in the introduction and conclusion.

Responses needed to be grounded in the religious traditions studied, not based on subjective comments or beliefs of the students.

Example 1



The following is part of the introductory sections from an articulate, knowledgeable and relevant response that makes constant reference to the question. The response would have benefited from the use of more quotations and text references to support the arguments presented.

Through a significant life experience on the road to Damascus St Paul's understanding and interpretation of his core religious beliefs as a Jew were significantly impacted on as he came to understand the purpose of living for others and the concepts of life after death central to Christian tradition. Paul, formerly Saul, lived as a Jew before his encounter with Christ and had a set of significant core beliefs that gave him purpose and direction based on his faith. His significant experience and blinding on the road to Damascus gave him time to re-consider and re-interpret the nature of these beliefs and purpose. Converted to a Christian Paul then had a new purpose that centered around what awaited at the end of life in salvation and what he was required to do on earth, living his life for others.

Saul was born a Jew and grew up to become a Pharisee in the faith. He had a set of core beliefs based on his upbringing and the strict nature of his vocation as a Pharisee in society, a respected member of the community. Based on the teachings detailed in the Torah and emphasized by leading members of the faith Saul believed in one judging and all-powerful God, omnipotent and vengeful when needed. He also believed in the coming of the messiah or anointed one who would free the Jews and open the gates to heaven. In accordance with his sect, he also strongly believed that salvation and favour in God's eyes came through strict observance of the Jewish Law. However, like many Jews Saul refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, a man who was showing complete disregard for the laws of his people. Thus, he saw Christians as heretics who by God's law and will must be punished. So it was that Saul originally based on his core beliefs as a Jew believed that his purpose in life was to follow strict Jewish law and do God's work by persecuting heretics and blasphemers claiming Jesus a mortal as the Son of God to gain God's favour. It was not until after his significant life experience that he would reconsider his purpose and consider living for others and salvation as ultimate directions in life.

...During the time it took Saul to recover from his blindness and experience he spent much time contemplating its significance. He could no longer deny the existence of Christ as the Son of God and this meant accepting Christ's teachings and concepts. ...He now believed in a Trinitarian yet monotheistic God who was loving and forgiving. He also accepted Christ's resurrection and thus the coming of the Messiah. Lastly he now accepted that the gates of heaven had been opened and that salvation came through faith alone not observance of earthly laws. These fundamental re-interpretations would give Paul a new sight and a new purpose centered round living for others and what came after life and death.