



## GENERAL COMMENTS

Students and teachers should note that a new *Religion and Society VCE Study Design* has been accredited for the period 2006–2010. A sample examination, based on the new Study Design, is available on the VCAA website ([www.vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au)). The 2005 examination and this report are based on the old Study Design.

Overall, assessors were impressed with the improved standard of responses in the middle and lower ranges of marks. There were fewer students who had written nothing, or whose responses contained little of substance. The vast majority of responses to the essay questions were able to achieve at least 10 or more marks out of 20. There continued to be a high number of excellent and very competent responses.

The increased diversity of topics was pleasing to see, as was the small but growing number of students who had attempted to study more than one religious tradition. Both of these developments should be encouraged.

Assessors continued to be disappointed with students' lack of understanding of the deeper significance of the beliefs of the religious traditions being studied. Knowledge points can be easily learned by students who are prepared to put in the work. The meaning of the beliefs and the way they are used to interpret life and the world is a major area that needs improvement. It often seemed that students had put so much effort into remembering facts and information (which were quite relevant to their school-assessed coursework) that there was little room for esoteric and reflective responses that could be rewarded for their depth of understanding and analytical thought. Related to this is the ongoing problem of students presenting prepared essays rather than showing a thorough understanding of the concepts and knowledge and an ability to discuss and evaluate their function.

### Essay Technique

Students need to keep working at their essay technique and ensure that their answer to the question posed is clearly established in the introduction. It is also necessary to return to this contention throughout the essay by clearly showing how the content of each paragraph supports the answer offered in the introduction. Many students appear to lack good argumentative and discursive essay techniques.

If students write plans for their essays they should write on the lined pages, not on the blank pages. Some students' plans were as long as the essay. Teachers should ensure that students know how to write a useful essay plan.

### Names

Students should name the religious tradition being used in every question. There was an increasing tendency to use abbreviations for proper nouns. This should not be encouraged, as abbreviations may not be clear to assessors. People should be referred to by their full name or title if there could be confusion over which individual is being referred to.

### Evidence

Students tended to overuse the term 'proof', when often such 'proof' could only realistically be claimed as supportive evidence.

### Context

Students had obviously worked on this area, and many had a wide knowledge of their topics. Students should now improve their ability to focus this contextual knowledge; for example, how precisely did a particular trend/event/movement/theological interpretation/action influence or affect the topic under discussion?

It continues to be important for students who are writing from a particular theological perspective within a selected religious tradition to acknowledge that perspective and not to claim that it represents the whole tradition. If the perspective taken is that of the official teaching of a religious tradition, this should be made clear and, when appropriate to the question, the existence of differing positions within the tradition should be acknowledged.

### Beliefs and Core Beliefs

Teachers need to train their students to state religious beliefs rather than just vague, social ideas that may be underpinned by religious beliefs. The beliefs of individuals and groups need to be linked to the core beliefs of their religious tradition. These beliefs then need to be articulated clearly, not just vaguely referred to as, for example, the tradition's belief about God.



The word belief and other key terminology are used too loosely by many students, often to the point that they mean nothing. For example, ‘*A belief can be altered but never changed.*’ This quite typical statement indicates confusion in the meaning of vocabulary, which needs to be addressed.

The concept of core belief permeates the Study Design for Units 3 and 4. Teachers should regularly check that students understand Unit 3, Area of Study 1, as this is of primary importance to helping students perform well in the exam. Teachers should also ensure that students have a good understanding of the theology and core beliefs particular to the religious tradition being studied; eschatological beliefs, in particular, need work.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

### Section A – Short-answer questions

The questions in Section A were short-answer questions, therefore students were not expected to write more than one page in response, and even that was excessive unless the writing was very large or the expression extremely imprecise.

Section A questions covered Units 3 and 4 and provided students with an opportunity to show their knowledge and understanding of the interaction of religion and society and of specialised terminology relevant to the tradition(s) studied. Generally, the standard of responses in this section had improved.

#### Question 1

**What makes a religious belief a core belief?**

**Support your explanation with an example.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	16	30	26	24	2.5

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 1, ‘Meaning in religious traditions’, with emphasis on the knowledge point from Outcome 1, that students should demonstrate knowledge of:

- a range of core beliefs in one or more religious traditions including
  - the conception of ultimate reality
  - the nature and purpose of human life
  - the relationship between human life and the rest of the natural world
  - questions of meaning in life.

Students firstly needed to give a brief explanation or definition of ‘core belief. This should have been non-tradition specific, and not simply an example. Responses needed to explain the central, pivotal nature of the core belief for other beliefs developed from that core and for the tradition itself. Students should have shown an understanding that the nature of the religious tradition is changed if a core belief is changed or removed. Students should then have illustrated their understanding of core belief with an example of a correct core belief from a particular religious tradition. This needed to be briefly explained, rather than just stated.

Many answers continued to be too long and were often unfocused. Students would be better to spend this time on Sections B and C.

The first part of the question was poorly dealt with by many students, who were unable to clearly explain the nature of a core belief. Students need to practise defining general terms that are not tradition specific, such as ‘belief’ and ‘core belief’.

The second part of the question, which asked students to provide an example, was answered easily by many students. However, when giving their example, some students were unable to show how the belief they chose was a core belief; that is, how the tradition centres on that belief.

Some students took an unnecessarily difficult approach to the question and presented a synopsis of their development of belief essay, which was not often a successful method for answering the question. Other students, who responded to the question by attempting to discuss one or more of the eight aspects of religion, did not address the core belief part of question.



Overall, responses showed that many students understood that core beliefs are fundamental to the tradition and that without them the tradition would no longer exist.

Following are some examples of student responses. Although not perfect, these responses were consistently argued, contained enough accurate points, and clearly illustrated the students' explanations of core belief with accurate examples of core beliefs from the religious traditions studied.

The following response used ethical monotheism as a core belief of Judaism to support the student's explanation.

*The attribute which differentiates attendant or contingent beliefs from the core beliefs of a tradition is the significance of these core beliefs in the lives of the adherents of a tradition throughout the ages. A core belief is never completely abandoned or reformulated it is merely the particulars regarding that belief which do so and thus this fact makes it a core belief. The core beliefs of a religious tradition have been, are, and will be extremely significant and imperative to ensure the continuity and the ability of a religion to remain intact. Therefore a religious belief is a core belief as it is essential in ensuring the resilience of a tradition, as it gives meaning to the religion and aids the members in maintaining their beliefs.*

This next response used the Roman Catholic tradition's belief in One God, Three Persons as the core belief to illustrate the student's explanation.

*A religious belief is identified as a core belief in a religious tradition, when it is central to the tradition's teachings. As a core belief, it should provide the main messages of the tradition to the people, and should be essential to the tradition, because if were changed or altered, then the tradition would too be altered. If the core belief is only a religious belief, and can be changed, then the interconnected beliefs of the tradition become questionable.*

This student supported their explanation with the Christian belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour.

*A core belief in the Christian, an indeed any tradition, is a belief which is central to the tradition and remains central throughout the religion's history. A core belief may indicate the presence of a higher being, indicate the nature of reality and distinguish the tradition from other traditions.*

## Question 2

**'For a little while we just are. Then we aren't.'**

**Based upon your study of the beliefs of a particular religious tradition, briefly explain this quotation.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	11	19	11	9	10	11	11	9	8	3.6

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 1, 'Meaning in religious traditions', with emphasis on the knowledge points from Outcomes 1 and 2, that students should demonstrate knowledge of:

- a range of core beliefs in one or more religious traditions including
  - the conception of ultimate reality
  - the nature and purpose of human life
  - the relationship between human life and the rest of the natural world
  - questions of meaning in life
- significant life experiences such as commitment, suffering, death, and human relationships which may be interpreted in light of core beliefs.

Students needed to clearly accept/reject or agree/disagree with the ideas in the statement, from the perspective of a religious tradition.

The statement implied a particular understanding of the meaning of existence, the purpose of existence, the meaning of death, and the possibility of life after death. Students should have shown an awareness of these implied meanings as they explained how these were similar to or different from the beliefs about existence, life, death, and an afterlife of a particular religious tradition they had studied.

There were some excellent responses that showed sound eschatology and the student's competent ability to articulate beliefs about the kingdom of God. The students who identified the nihilistic possibility in this quotation grasped the topic well. Other students, who had good insight and knowledge about the relevant beliefs of the studied religious traditions, failed to link their responses to the quotation.

Disappointingly, a number of students missed the connection between the quotation and the criteria for Unit 3, Outcome 1 regarding the nature and purpose of human life, as well as the religious tradition's understanding of what happens after death. Those who did make the connection often focused on death and an after life and ignored the first half of the quotation '...we just are', which related to the meaning and purpose of life.



Many students acknowledged the statement and then agreed with it in total. This suggested to assessors that students may have been hesitant about disagreeing with the statement or were unaware that they could disagree.

Responses to this question indicated that students need to practise analysing belief statements from the wider society to see what is being said and then comparing these perceptions and belief claims with what is believed by the religious tradition(s) under study. This is part of the investigation of the interaction between religion and society.

This following successful response from the Christian tradition deals with each part of the quotation and refers to the quotation throughout.

*The Christian tradition has distinct beliefs in the nature and purpose of human existence, and also of the afterlife. To say that 'for a little while we just are' would be contradictory to the Christian belief that all life has a purpose, that God created humans in God's likeness, and they were placed on the earth to be stewards of creation, to cultivate and care for it as outlined in Genesis. The Catholic document Gaudium et Spes also indicates this, saying that humans are social beings and we are oriented towards others in God, to care for and nurture God's creation. To also say 'then we aren't' implies that there is nothing after death, which contradicts the Christian teachings of heaven and the afterlife. The Christian tradition believes that after a person dies their soul – 'the transcendental connection with God' – is laid to rest with God in the Kingdom of heaven and they come to recognise the 'fullness of life'; not just, 'aren't' any more.*

The following first two paragraphs of a response from the Judaic tradition responded to the quotation at the beginning and then implied that the rest of the response is contradicting the content of the quotation. It would have been better to refer to the particular part of the quotation being argued against and to clearly state the ideas that are being rejected. However, it is still a sound response.

*Judaism would respond to the given quote by rejecting it. The quote reflects the idea that there is nothing beyond the grave. Although Judaism is yet to attain a consistent theory regarding death and the afterlife, it believes that man has a purpose in God's cosmos and that after his death there is an 'Olam Haba' (afterlife/world to come).*

*Judaism holds that God gave man specific tasks to fulfil in the divinely created universe and therefore he is significant. He is given dominion (Gen 1:26) over the natural world and is entrusted by God to be an 'oved' (worker) and 'shver' (caretaker) of the world (Genesis 2:15) However after man dies Judaism holds that his soul or 'neshamah' is everlasting and that the body is merely a vehicle for the eternal soul during one's lifetime. The souls of the righteous are believed to return to God's heavenly and utopian Garden of Eden while the souls of the 'average person' will be sent to 'Gehinom' – a place of purification.*

Next, this first paragraph of a response from the Islamic tradition begins by referring to the quotation and showing where there is agreement and disagreement with the beliefs of Islam. However, the student then went on to speak only of the beliefs of Islam about life and death without referring further to the quotation or showing where Islam would agree or disagree with the claims of the statement. This response represents the typical partial response made by many students using various religious traditions.

*The quotation clearly shows the inevitability of a human life on earth. This is so because the only thing that is certain in this life is death, no matter who you are or where you're from. The Islamic perspective of death is also as such, however Islamic beliefs and teachings state also that life is short and is also a test from God-Allah in which followers or Muslims ready themselves for death and later on meeting their creator-Allah.*

### Question 3

**Briefly demonstrate how the beliefs of a religious tradition you have studied are reflected in its vision of society.**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	6	15	14	15	14	13	11	7	4	3.6

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 1, 'Meaning in religious traditions', with emphasis on the knowledge point from Outcome 1, that students should demonstrate knowledge of:

- a range of core beliefs in one or more religious traditions including
  - the conception of ultimate reality
  - the nature and purpose of human life
  - the relationship between human life and the rest of the natural world
  - questions of meaning in life

and Unit 4, Area of Study 2, 'Beliefs in action', with emphasis on the knowledge point from Outcome 2, that students should demonstrate knowledge of:

- the vision of human community implied in the beliefs of one or more religious traditions.

In responding to this question, students needed to:

- identify the religious tradition studied
- explain the religious tradition's vision of society



- connect this vision to specific religious beliefs within the tradition (including its core beliefs, as studied in Unit 3, Area of Study 1).

The question did not ask students to refer to an example from a case study, but, rather, focused on the vision and the related religious beliefs of the religious tradition as a whole. Some students presented stunning visions of the world, and lots of beliefs, core or otherwise, were mentioned, but few students made adequate (or any) links between the beliefs and the vision. Other students nominated core beliefs that were not actually core beliefs.

Some students misunderstood the question, incorrectly interpreting it as a question that related to the eight aspects of religion. Such students leapt straight into the expression of beliefs through various social justice and religious actions rather than explaining the beliefs.

In many responses the vision of society described was vague and superficial, certainly not linking to specific core beliefs about the nature and purpose of human existence. This was particularly the case with responses that used Caritas Australia for this question – students were often unable to articulate adequately the way in which the religious tradition’s vision of society inspires the work of Caritas. Indeed, most students who referred to an example of an individual or group did not answer this question very successfully. These students often resorted to the vision of a specific person or group that they had studied in Unit 4 without referring to the beliefs of the religious tradition that had contributed to that particular person’s vision. Teachers need to give students plenty of practice in clearly and succinctly writing the vision for humanity which is consistent with the religious tradition(s) specific core beliefs about God and the nature and purpose of human life. It is these beliefs that underpin the ethical principles and values that give form to the vision for human society. An example of a good way to structure a response to this question is, ‘Because [religious tradition] believe that God is ... and humans were created to ..., then individuals should live their lives trying to achieve ... and society should be ...’

There were many factual errors and exaggerations in responses to this question. For example, ‘*It was not until the arrival of Jesus that poverty was abolished.*’

Any theology that was used needed to be explicit. Although theological terms were generally present in responses, the explanations of these terms were often underdeveloped or missing. For example, ‘*The beliefs of the...tradition are greatly reflected in its vision of society.*’ Although this statement showed the student’s agreement with the contention of the question, it merely restates the question and offers no further information about these beliefs or the precise nature of the vision.

Following are some examples of successful responses to this question.

#### Example 1

*In the Roman Catholic Christian tradition it is believed that the vision of the ideal human society will be inaugurated in the future times but the vision can also be reflected by society in the here and now. By following and acknowledging the core beliefs concerning the human person, mankind can establish and reflect the ideal human society here on earth in the present times. The human person is called to be a steward of God’s creation (Gen 2:15) and to love one another as I have love d you (Jn 13:34). As a result the human person must care for all of God’s creation, which includes every single human and ‘love thy neighbours and enemies’. The human person is made in the ‘image and likeness of God’ so as a result should act in the same way as Him. In God’s own community of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all live in a community of peace, love and equality. Because the human person is made in God’s image and likeness then they too should live in this way. Finally the teachings and actions of Jesus reveal the way and the true meaning of the ideal human society. When he took human form Jesus began the building of God’s ideal human society or reign on earth. Jesus healed the blind, cared for the poor and sacrificed his life for the love of others. If the human person can follow his example, then they too can build the ideal human society here on earth, and reflect the vision of the ideal human society which will be evident in the future times (Eschaton).*

#### Example 2

*Beliefs are demonstrated in a view of an ideal religious-based society by being a part of all the principle elements of the society. This is quite true to the Islamic based vision of the ideal society. This is so because the vision of an ideal Islamic society encapsulates all three major core beliefs that are belief in one God-Allah, the hereafter-Al-Alchira, and prophethood-Risalah. As a result the society would also include consequent beliefs that are based on core beliefs. According to this the ideal Islamic society or way of living for all people would be one based on the shanah law which is of course derived from the core beliefs and hence be Allah’s (God’s) kingdom on earth. Living in such a society would also mean all people would strive to do what is good in Allah’s eyes.*

This response went on to show specifically what this would mean in terms of human behaviour living according to Islamic beliefs.

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## Example 3

*Judaism holds that God created an ideal society in the pristine Garden of Eden. However it was not until man failed to curb his 'yetzer hara' (evil inclination) and abused his God-given free will (Genesis 3) that the vision of society was destroyed. Thus Judaism holds and believes that man must live a harmonious existence in order to strive for 'Tikkun Olam' (the perfection of the world).*

This response proceeded to show how this vision and its belief sources are expressed in ethical aspects of Judaism.

## Section B – Essay questions

Marks	0	4	5	6
%	1	28	55	16

Marks	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38	40	Average
%	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	3	6	5	7	8	11	7	9	8	6	4	4	2	2	22.8

## Question 4

**'Testing times test our beliefs.'**

**Discuss this statement in relation to the development of a particular belief of a religious tradition you have studied.**

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 2, 'Development of religious beliefs' with emphasis on the knowledge points from Outcome 3, that students should develop knowledge of:

- the continuous dimension of a core belief within one or more religious traditions
- the factors internal and external to the religious tradition which prompted development, reformulation, reinterpretation or change in the expression of a core religious belief(s).

In Questions 4 and 5, students needed to engage with the statement and explore what was meant by 'testing times' and what was the nature of the test. They should have explained why and how religious beliefs would be tested by such times and with what outcomes. A broader discussion should have been followed by a discussion of their selected example, which should have illustrated some of this general understanding. Realistic claims for the example needed to be made. Students should have shown that they understood that testing is not necessarily bad; testing is part of the process of refining and consolidating beliefs.

Responses needed to be placed in a clear socio-historical and religious context. Students were able to discuss the statement using a single event and its implications for a particular belief, or by discussing a number of historical testing times. Some students wrote about more than one belief, which reduced their ability to adequately discuss any of the selected beliefs.

This question was generally well answered, and the better students were able to relate the internal and external factors that they had studied to the term 'testing times', identifying the various ways in which these factors were 'testing'. There were some excellent responses from students who understood that examples of tests can also be challenging ideas, as well as violence, repression, poverty and disaster. The majority of students referred regularly to the quotation's 'testing times', although some interpreted the statement in a limited way. Many students showed detailed knowledge, used quotations appropriately and effectively, and incorporated a wide and correct theological vocabulary.

The perception that 'testing times' can reinforce beliefs was well understood by some students. This view allowed students who had focused on a historical-review approach to successfully answer this question. Unfortunately, other students gave good lists of the stages of development of a religious belief but did not mention any testing times.

Some students misinterpreted the focus of the question and wrote about the expression of the belief, rather than the belief itself, being tested at different times and how these testing circumstances contributed to the development of the belief. Other students took a core belief and then said it did not develop, which was an inadequate response to this question. These students would have been wiser to answer Question 5 or 6 instead.

Those who had studied examples of heresy had excellent material for their response, but few defined heresy or gave any sense of its seriousness for the unity of the Church. The rise of heretics and the need for council responses implies 'testing times', but the context was often not made explicit. In many of these responses modern expectations of freedom of thought and expression were overlaid on an historical situation where authority and the nature of the individual were understood differently. This meant that the heart of the nature of the 'testing times' was not sufficiently understood.



Too many students gave responses that were simply reworked SACs which did not directly address the question. Many of these students were also hindered by an inability to remember the correct logical sequence and precise detail of their material. Many of these students did little to work their material to the concept of testing times either in agreement or disagreement.

A number of students wrote about the Catholic Christian tradition, focusing on Mary as Theotokos. Although the content of such responses was generally good and received high marks, there was a similarity to the answers that suggested the students had learned the material by heart from a common source.

A typical opening statement for many responses was “*Testing times test our beliefs*” can indeed be applied to all religious traditions over the time of their existence.’ Unfortunately, many students did not follow up this promising opening statement with any significant discussion, instead launching straight into their studied example.

Many quite competent essays remained undeveloped in the discussion of the statement. For example, ‘*In the...religious tradition core beliefs are often tested “due to testing times” of pressure, however these core beliefs remain unchanged due to their vital status.*’ At no point in this otherwise knowledgeable piece of writing did the student identify clearly the nature of this ‘pressure’. The student needed to establish what sort of pressure, precisely what, or who, was pressured and the source of the pressure. The student then needed to follow this with selected examples from the historical development of the chosen belief that would clearly illustrate this explanation of pressure.

Many students included all the stages of development for their studied belief rather than selecting relevant examples that illustrated the pressures faced. This would have worked if they had identified the different nature of the ‘testing times’ in these examples, but often ‘testing times’ remained a vague and unsubstantiated overgeneralisation.

Topics used in Question 4 included:

- the Trinity
- the Eucharist
- the Resurrection
- Mary as Theotokos (although this would have worked better for Question 8 as the development overview approach did not always fit the testing times focus of the question)
- the human and divine natures of Jesus
- the Hypostatic Union and Christology
- God as Father (this did not work well)
- ecological crisis/God as Creator/Thomas Berry (these would also have worked better for Question 8).
- the existence of God.

### Question 5

#### ‘Testing times test our beliefs.’

**Discuss this statement in relation to the experiences of an individual or group within a religious tradition you have studied.**

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 1, ‘Meaning in religious traditions’, with emphasis on the knowledge points from Outcome 2, that students must develop knowledge of:

- significant life experiences such as commitment, suffering, death, and human relationships which may be interpreted in light of core beliefs
- the impact of core religious beliefs on a person’s or group’s experience of suffering, commitment, death, human relationships and/or other significant life experiences.

There needed to be clear identification of the religious tradition to which the group or individual belongs. Students then should have explained how the person or group understands the relevant religious beliefs and compared this understanding to official understandings of the beliefs. This is part of the exploration of the interaction of the person or group’s experience with the religious beliefs. It may also have been part of the explanation for the responses to the testing times. Minimal biographical detail was needed, and students should have selected only those factors that were relevant to explaining the context of the person or group at the time of their testing experience.

The primary requirement of Questions 4 and 5 was an analysis of the beliefs of a religious tradition. It was hoped that the use of the same quotation would indicate this to the students, but this did not seem to be the case. The greatest difficulty for the majority of students was that they continued to simply tell the person or group’s life story without



specifically referring to religious beliefs that interact with the particular experience and testing times. Nevertheless, many students answered this question very well.

Many students obviously attempted to link biographical detail with religious beliefs, although the articulation of the beliefs was often still weak. There were too many vague belief statements such as 'His belief in God led him to...' or 'Beliefs in the tradition led to...'

Students who used a film needed to contextualise the film so that the character was related to particular situations in history. The film or book cannot stand alone.

Following is the introduction to a successful and interestingly distinctive response to this question.

*Every individual must confront a significant life experience and often this invariably includes an encounter with overwhelming loss or suffering. The statement 'testing times test our beliefs' is significant in dealing with loss or suffering because often after a horrific experience one questions their faith in God. However the meaning which one draws from such experience depends on whether or not they still have faith in God and also the way in which they view the world. Often a relationship with God can be a sustaining factor in dealing with trauma and catastrophe however on the other hand it can be a hurdle in moving on with one's life. Often the writings of those who have experienced loss can help others to understand the way in which 'testing times' warrant a reassessment of life and death. The Noble Laureate and Holocaust survivor Eli Weisel has devoted the majority of his writings of the years to extrapolating some kind of meaning from his experiences of suffering and loss during the period of the Shod (Holocaust).*

*In his essay 'To Believe or not to Believe' Weisel begins with a recollection of his childhood in which he remembers being certain of God's love. This is the memory of a benevolent God who established an everlasting covenant with the Jewish people. 'Somewhere...a Jewish child is saying his daily prayers... "I believe with perfect faith that the creator blessed be his name is the author and guide of everything that has been created."' In other words Weisel describes himself during his childhood as a believer.*

Although there is still confusion in this response about the nature of testing times, the student did attempt to define and differentiate.

Following is another introduction from an excellent response. This student also showed argumentative skill, though there was room for improvement in the preciseness of language, especially in the juxtaposition of names and explanation of terms.

*Testing times can be defined as inevitable human experiences of an individual that are of a harsh nature. Testing times may include suffering, persecution, rejection, or disagreements with others in relationships. In the case of St Paul in the Christian (Catholic) tradition his experience of harsh realities and testing times had a significant affect on his beliefs. Some experiences tested and questioned his beliefs. However it must be understood that not only testing times test our beliefs for instance that of his conversion and God working miracles through him also have a significant effect on his beliefs.*

*An experience of St Paul that could be described as a 'testing time' in his life was that of his conversion on the road to Damascus. Saul saw a blinding vision and heard Jesus say to him: 'Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?' This is known as Saul's conversion. Prior to his conversion Saul was a Pharisee Jew that believed that Jesus was a false messiah and he was engaged in persecuting them. Saul also believed that the only way to salvation was through complying with the 613 laws of the Torah. However this experience of Saul significantly tested his Jewish beliefs and they revolutionised what he believed in. Subsequent to this experience Paul changed his beliefs and became a Jesus follower.*

Topics used in Question 5 included:

- Sunchasers (film)
- Bishop Polycarp
- Eli Weisel/Debovah Lipstadt
- Debovah Lipstadt (this worked better when used in comparison with Eli Weisel, but students still found it difficult to articulate clearly the nature of the testing times for her religious beliefs)
- Martin Luther King
- Dr Billings
- Bonhoffer
- Mother Theresa
- Caritas
- Galileo and heliocentricity
- SC Lewis
- Sir Thomas Moore
- L'Arch and Jean Vanier (this was not a good fit, and students found it difficult to select facts to show testing times)
- Thomas Berry and anthropocentrism

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- St Paul's conversion (responses on this topic were often too vague about his beliefs and exactly what was tested)
- Sheila Cassidy
- Father Damien of Molokai
- Mendoza (this topic was not well done, with students often omitting the historical context)
- Helen Prejean
- Dorothy Day
- Jean Donovan
- Archbishop Oscar Romero
- Cardinal Bernadine
- Marcellin Champagnet
- Catholic people in the Black Death era
- the Anglican Bishop in Rwanda
- Reokie Billel.

## Question 6

### **How are beliefs about a higher being communicated to members of a religious tradition you have studied?**

This question covered Unit 3, Area of Study 1, 'Meaning in religious traditions' with emphasis on the knowledge point from Outcome 1, that students should develop knowledge of:

- core beliefs in one or more religious traditions including the conception of ultimate reality
- the expression of these beliefs in aspects of the tradition(s).

The religious tradition needed to be clearly identified and the tradition's beliefs about a higher being clearly explained. Responses had to deal with beliefs about God.

The question allowed for revelation to be considered as a means of communication. Students were expected to explore the relationship of some of the other aspects of religion as a means of communicating the religious beliefs.

Students should be able to explain how, in the particular religious tradition(s), specific beliefs are communicated to members. Some possibilities are through text (sacred documents, theological commentaries, official teachings, and writings of religious leaders and inspirational religious role models); through symbol and ritual; through traditional and contemporary stories; through factual and fictional oral accounts; through written and visual means (this would include works of art, architecture and music); through the living out of these beliefs; and through the religious experience and social structure of the tradition.

Students needed to show how members of a tradition are introduced to the beliefs about a higher being and how these beliefs are nurtured, sustained, and reinforced. Students should have been able to show how opportunities for commitment and recommitment to these beliefs are offered in the tradition. They should have considered the role in the communication of these beliefs of religious education programs in schools of the religious tradition(s), further religious study, and in the guidance and modelling of the religious leaders of the tradition (past and present).

This was a deceptively simple question. Most students who answered this question took a very limited approach, and did not address many of the above areas in their responses. Many of these students wrote very brief essays, often due to the narrowness of their view of methods of communicating religious beliefs. Other students focused too much on the expression of belief and made little mention of the belief about a higher being.

There were also, however, many successful responses from all the studied traditions, as students worked through a few of the aspects of religion to show how beliefs about God are communicated to members of the tradition.

A potentially excellent strategy was seen in a few responses where students used the Catholic Christian tradition and focused on the belief statements about God found in the Nicene Creed. They then attempted to show how these beliefs were communicated through symbols, rituals and stories about Jesus. Unfortunately, these students did not go on to consider the many other possible methods of communication. Many of these responses also lacked clarity, coherence, and accuracy.

Students who answered this question generally showed good knowledge of some of the aspects of religion. However, some students emphasised only one avenue of communication, which made for a very limited response. Other students turned the question's focus from the religious tradition's communication of its beliefs about a higher being into



communication by God about God. This misinterpretation of the question, which occurred in responses across all religious traditions, made for a limited response.

Below are the introduction, one paragraph and the conclusion to a typical example of essays for this question. In the body of the essay the student wrote a paragraph on each of the named ways, successfully identifying the belief, the aspect and the ways in which the aspect communicates the belief.

*The beliefs about God (Allah) are communicated to members of the religion in many ways.*

*The beliefs about God are communicated to Muslim when they go to Hajj (Pilgrimage). On Hajj the Muslims follow the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad and also visit places reminding them of other people and the love God showed them. For example when Muslims visit the Mountains of Miru they remember Hagar and her baby and how Allah showed them his mercy and gave them a spring of water in the middle of the desert. This spring is now famous in Islam and is known by the term 'Zum Zum'. The Muslims believe that this water is special and gives blessings to those who drink. Thus as a result of this the Muslims belief in God being beneficent is reinforced.*

*In Islam the beliefs about God are communicated to its followers through the Qur'an, the prayers Muslims perform, through Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and through Hajj (Pilgrimage).*

It was a pity this student did not see that the other aspects are also used by the tradition in its communication of beliefs about God.

### Section C – Essay questions

Marks	0	7	8
%	1	55	44

Marks	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38	40	Average
%	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	6	5	8	6	8	9	9	7	7	5	5	3	2	23.4

#### Question 7

**'Religious belief leads to action.'**

**To what extent is this statement true of an individual or group in a religious tradition you have studied?**

This question covered Unit 4, Area of Study 2, 'Beliefs in action', with emphasis on the knowledge points from Outcome 2, that students should develop knowledge of:

- the vision of human community implied in the beliefs of one or more religious traditions
- the ways in which beliefs impel individuals or groups to act to transform society
- specific examples of the actions of individuals and/or groups when impelled by their religious beliefs about the ideal human community.

Students needed to engage with the ideas in the statement and explain why they agreed or disagreed with them. They should have discussed the limits of the statement and used it as the lens through which they could discuss the particular example they had selected. The question allowed students to recognise that religious beliefs may not be the only, or indeed the primary, source for the action taken by people from the tradition. It allowed students to consider the interactive relationship between religion and society.

Not all religious beliefs lead to action or to the same type of action. For many believers, beliefs remain personal and private, perhaps even removed from their daily social interaction. Not all will be inspired and then able to take overt social action in response to their religious beliefs. Students should have identified particular beliefs and explained their relationship to the action of the individual or group from the religious tradition. The action must have been grounded within the beliefs of the tradition.

Some issues that students could have discussed in their essays included:

- the interplay of religious and social influences to bring about the actions of the individual or group
- the special role of the religious beliefs
- whether there is a special dynamic involved in those who act through religious conviction. If so, what is it? How does it work? What difference does it make?
- many people work to create a better world, but not all of them do it for religious reasons.

Students engaged well with this question in their responses. However, there was a lack of preciseness in referring to beliefs and to their connection to a particular action. Explanations of terms and statements were often omitted,



particularly in Islamic responses. Although well-crafted, some responses were too biographical and barely touched the question. Others students, especially those using film as their main reference, spent excessive time retelling the story, with little impact on the question. Neither of these approaches could be awarded high marks.

Too many students appeared to use pre-learned responses without making the necessary connections and references to the 'to what extent' part of the question. There were also some responses that had long lists of actions with no mention of beliefs. Over-generalisations abounded and many claims were unsubstantiated. Some students discussed more than one person or group, which did not advantage them in adequately dealing with the question.

Following is the introduction of an excellent response to Question 7. The topic fits the question well, though not all students who chose this topic were able to express their information and understanding as clearly or to successfully adapt the copious material to the focus of the question.

*Every religion has a vision of an ideal community. Judaism is no exception. While influences such as materialism and the general allure of modernity have impelled many to abandon religion in favour of secularism certain religious groups have persevered and preserved their beliefs in modern times. In Judaism it is the Chabad Lubaritz group who driven religious beliefs pursues a unique devotion to the betterment of humankind. This group is a sub movement of the large Chassidic (pietist) Ultra Orthodox movement, which developed in 18th century Eastern Europe. Its founder, Schrew Zalmon placed emphasis on religious beliefs, which led to action in increasing the godliness amongst every individual. The movement conveys its aim in its name 'Chabad' an acronym of 'Chochma' – wisdom, 'Binah' – understanding and 'Duat' – knowledge. These are the ideals that act as the impetus in translating Chabad's beliefs into action.*

*Chabad embraces all Classical Orthodox Jewish beliefs but places particular emphasis on the notion of 'Tikkum Olam' – world perfection, Messianism, 'Aharat Yisrael' – love of ones fellows and the divine spark within each individual. The movement's beliefs are translated into action in the promotion of the Universal Seven Noachide Laws (Gen 9) which are believed to hasten the coming of the messianic Age. Indeed Chabad's beliefs regarding world perfection and a utopian society led to action when the movement provided universal humanitarian aid in the Chernobyl meltdown (1986), the Turkish earthquakes (1994) and more recently the Tsunami in Thailand (2004). These acts demonstrate the way in which the movement's religious beliefs lead to action, thus emphasizing the extent to which the statement is true.*

This essay continued for another three pages to provide precisely argued examples that showed how particular actions of the Chabad movement are linked to their religious beliefs. The conclusion then provided a contemporary religious context for Chabad and a succinct summary of the essay in relation to the question asked.

*The Chabad-Lubaritch movement is singled out from other Ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups as it has attempted to give practical expression to a host of its beliefs in order to achieve change (both social and religious). It has served to bridge the gap between observance and total estrangement by marrying their religion's ethical underpinnings and scholarship with spirituality in the process of becoming the most influential inspirational dynamic and initiate cradler of Jewish self-expression. Their religious beliefs, which ultimately strive for an ideal society to be established, lead to their expression of such doctrines through actions. The statement that 'religious beliefs lead to action' thus proves true with regard to this movement within the Jewish religious tradition.*

Topics used in Question 7 included:

- Oscar Romero (this worked better here than in Question 5)
- Chassidism
- the Good Samaritan Sisters
- Iman Ghazali
- Mendoza (there was not enough substance in this topic)
- Marcellin Champagnat
- Amnesty International (this was not an appropriate group for this Study Design, as it does not have its basis in any particular religious tradition)
- Father Damien of Molokai
- Frederick Ozanam
- Anglican women working towards ordination (this would have worked better if linked to core beliefs such as 'made in the image of God')
- Mary MacKillop
- Caritas
- Marist Brothers
- Uniting Care
- St Vincent de Paul
- Jean Vanier and L'Arche
- Sr Helen Prejean
- Brigidine Sisters
- Edmund Rice

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- Pope John Paul II
- Mother Theresa
- World Vision.

## Question 8

**In a religious tradition you have studied, discuss the response of that tradition to a specific challenge in its religious and socio-historical context.**

This question covered Unit 4, Area of Study 1, 'Investigation of a significant challenge', with emphasis on the knowledge points from Outcome 1 that students should develop knowledge of:

- a range of internal and external challenges that have faced one or more religious communities
- a particular challenge faced by one or more religious traditions
- the historical, social, and religious context of the particular challenge
- the impact of the challenge on the religious tradition
- the response of the religious tradition to the challenge
- the effects of the response both within the religious tradition, and in its relationship to society.

Students had to identify the religious tradition and the specific challenge. They should have placed the challenge in its specific time, place, and circumstances and explained why it occurred – what factors in the religion gave rise to the challenge? They also needed to explain what factors in society (political, economic, scientific, or social concerns) contributed to the challenge for the religion.

All of the above needed to be dealt with in this question, but should not have been the focus. The bulk of the answer should have referred to the above information as needed when dealing with the following points:

- the responses of the religion and where they came from within the religion
- why those responses were made rather than others
- whether the responses were adequate and why or why not
- the consequences of the responses.

Once again, generally this question was answered well. However, there was a concern with students whose responses were remarkably similar. This was particularly the case with those who wrote about the challenge of Luther and the Protestant reformation, the six responses of the Catholic Church to Luther's challenge and the evaluation of these responses. A group of students seemed to have been given a comprehensive theological study or essay format, which they used when writing their responses. The students' papers therefore had the same order of points, and even the same phrases, sentences and theological expressions. The original essay or study guide was excellent; unfortunately, students often neglected to carefully select material that was appropriate to the exam question. These students provided a lot of information, but the question asked for a discussion that focused on the responses of the tradition.

Students from the Jewish tradition who wrote about the challenge of gay members in their community clearly identified the origin of the challenge and outlined the various attitudes and responses within the tradition. However, in their conclusions, these students often used imprecise expressions and were unclear, or over simplified the matter by unsuccessfully reducing to one statement a situation that required several summary statements. In responses from the Catholic Christian tradition, the topics of Mary as Theotokos and Martin Luther and the Reformation are becoming increasingly popular for the study of continuity and development of a belief.

The following introduction illustrates three general weaknesses in responses to this question. *'Throughout time all religious traditions are faced with challenges. Challenges to their doctrine, their practice and even their theology itself.'*

- This introduction was not relevant as a response to this question.
- Even if had been relevant, there was no further expansion – the student went straight into an example to support what was argued about the dynamic interaction of religion and society.
- The way the terms in the second sentence are used suggests a lack of clarity about their meanings, which became more obvious as the essay developed.

There was a noticeable improvement in the theological understanding of the issues involved, and students often seemed to be able to write a great amount of information about this area of the Study Design. Again, the challenge was to link their knowledge to the point they were trying to make and to the point the question was asking. The following response illustrates this.

# 2005 Assessment Report



*In order to understand the capacity of Luther's challenge one must first understand the context in which it developed; one of turmoil and unrest. Historically Europe had experienced many wars throughout the 13th and 14th centuries with the most notable being the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). As nations sought political independence there was a rise in separate states, which in turn saw the break down of the previous continental unity. Socially after suffering an economic depression and the horrific ramifications of the Black Death (1338-1454) the European populace clung to the ideals associated with the humanist movement, which placed great value on individual worth. In regards to religious context many theological questions were being raised in regard to the theology and practices of the Catholic Church. Corruption was rife; this was exemplified perhaps most clearly in papal exile and the Great Western Schism (1378-1417) where there were three men all claiming to be Pope at the same time. Added to this mix was a Church which appeared to seek wealth and power rather than exemplify the teachings of Christ.*

In this response, the student should have brought this diverse historical heritage into the contemporary context for Luther's action. There needed to be more preciseness about the cause and effect relationship claims. The student needed to show the immediate context for Luther's challenge to the, then current, understanding of the doctrine of Salvation. Total claims like 'the Church' and 'the populous' should be limited. Other areas the student could have explored included:

- what was the Black Death?
- what were the horrific ramifications of the Black Death?
- what sort of corruption was rife?
- was it rife amongst all members of the Church?
- what were the Papal exile and the Great Western Schism?
- what were the teachings of Christ that are being contrasted with 'a Church seeking wealth and power'?

Students need to explain the terms used and specifically identify the event or circumstance's connection to the issue being explored. However, they must be careful not to spend too much time setting the scene, leaving little time to note the responses let alone discuss them.

Topics used in Question 8 included:

- Rerum Novarum
- the challenge of gays to the Jewish tradition
- the Holocaust (these responses were almost always very sound to excellent)
- Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation – the challenge to belief in salvation
- marriage/divorce/remarriage
- Vatican II and Pope John XXIII
- Hypostatic Union
- Ecumenical Councils
- Relativism and the Catholic Church's stance on current issues
- the Education Act in Australia
- the industrial revolution and workers' rights
- abortion
- homosexuality
- priestly ministry
- euthanasia
- an out of touch church
- the Renaissance – a world view
- feminism
- modernism.