

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most students completed the 2014 Religion and Society examination well. Some interesting and well-researched new topics in the different traditions were explored. Some regular topics were revitalised, showing signs of extended research, and students produced competent responses. Other students used quotations and referencing in their responses, though this remains an area to be further developed. It was very encouraging to see some students had studied more than one religious tradition and be able to use one or other religious tradition to answer different questions on the examination. It was apparent from the responses that the general points of key knowledge in the various Areas of Study had received greater attention. Students were able to define and explain key terms well. Overall, there was evidence of thoughtful reflection on content studied, but for most students this fell short of actual discussion or analysis.

Most students dealt competently with Section A and adequately with Section B, but competency declined in answering Section C. Questions dealing with Unit 3, Areas of Study 1 and 3 were generally well handled.

Areas that required further attention included:

- Answering the questions in Section C: Some students struggled to engage with the stimulus material. Their responses were prompted by key terms in the question and followed the key knowledge points of the study design, regardless of what the question asked or what the stimulus material suggested. Students need to practise the skills required in this section of the paper in preparation for the examination. There were some essays that appeared to be prepared and that largely ignored the stimulus material and its related question, except for a sentence or two in the introduction and/or the conclusion. Learning how to unpack and plan a response to essay questions does not mean repeatedly rewriting and memorising one essay for each Area of Study.
- Connection and context: In general, the clear areas of weakness involved connection and context, particularly within questions related to Unit 4, Area of Study 1 and Unit 3, Area of Study 2. Students needed to show more evidence of the ways religions and societies interact. These interactions can vary according to the religion and the particular historical circumstances, but there are some types of influence and strategies of response that apply generally across religions and their societies. These can be demonstrated through examples from the various religions. Students did not show evidence of research in this area of interaction. It was apparent that most students did not have an understanding of the overall development of the tradition studied. This was shown in superficial and overly generalised explanations, and often in incorrect cause and effect claims.
- Vocabulary: The paucity of descriptive and explanatory words used in responses contributed to students missing out on marks. This area needs attention.

SPECIFIC INFORMATION

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

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

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

Section A

Responses in this section were good, indicating that attention is being given to the terminology and concepts of the study design. Most students understood the questions in this section and provided competent responses.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	1	7	18	27	25	15	7	3.4

Both parts of this question needed to be addressed. The first part asked students to explain what 'religious belief' is, and responses should have covered the following points:

- Religious belief is an idea accepted as true on the basis of faith, with or without empirical evidence.
- Basically, religious belief constitutes ways of understanding mystery, of coming to terms with the big questions of existence.

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The second part asked why people hold religious beliefs. High-scoring responses recognised that there are diverse reasons for holding religious beliefs. Possible responses included:

- Religious beliefs could be ways of avoiding reality.
- Religious beliefs could be ways of acknowledging that there is potentially more than us, our world and our human knowledge and capacity.
- Religious beliefs could be a means to develop human potential.
- People may hold religious beliefs to help them answer the important questions of life, such as the meaning of life and death and the relationship between people and the natural world.
- Religious beliefs could offer individuals and groups a faith basis upon which to build a framework to help create meaning in life.
- Religious beliefs could help make sense of the world.
- Religious beliefs could provide security in the turmoil of the world.
- Religious beliefs could provide hope.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Religious belief may be regarded as a set of views concerning existence, the temporal world and its supernatural origins. They are held to be true in the sense that they are truths of faith. They may contain information related to the ultimate reality and lead adherents in accessing the divine. Some religious beliefs can be considered distinctive to a religious tradition forming its backbone and the source of its integrity. People may hold these religious beliefs as a means of hope for their lives. Religious beliefs can also have the ability to answer the existential questions that one may hold. In addition they can provide spiritual comfort and moral guidance through their existential truths.

Example 2

Religious belief is an integral part of religious traditions. They are ideas or concepts which are considered to be true and serve as the theological foundations of the tradition. Individuals hold religious beliefs to assist them in answering the existential questions of life such as 'What is my purpose?' or 'Why am I here?' Humans hold their religious beliefs as by their very nature they "seek to make sense of their lives" (Raimon Gaita, Philosopher). Similarly individuals hold religious beliefs in order to ensure guidance, direction and stability in their lives whilst assisting them in overcoming life's obstacles. They can also provide comfort and a sense of acceptance and place in the world.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	22	36	26	12	2.2

Many students failed to acknowledge that not all religious beliefs need to be maintained. Indeed, continuity of some beliefs may be detrimental to the religious tradition. Students consistently made the point that it is necessary to maintain continuity of beliefs so that the religious tradition remains relevant to its members and society, but rarely took this further to explain what they meant by relevant.

Possible answers included:

- Religious traditions must maintain continuity of distinctive religious beliefs in order to ensure that the essential messages and teachings of the tradition remain accurate and applicable throughout the ages.
- Maintaining continuity of such beliefs provides a rationale for other aspects of religion as expressed in particular traditions.
- The continuity of distinctive and significant beliefs ensures the tradition can be handed on to new generations and they can have confidence in what they receive.
- Distinctive beliefs need to be maintained because they provide the deepest level of identity for a religious tradition while also allowing for development of the belief and the tradition.
- If the distinctive or essential beliefs change greatly, then the basic premise of the tradition may change, and critics may attack the validity of the tradition.
- Radical change of some beliefs or the assumptions underpinning the beliefs can also be essential for the authenticity of a tradition as it comes to terms with advances in knowledge and understanding from different areas of human creativity.

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The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Religious traditions need to maintain continuity of religious beliefs, especially distinctive ones, in order to secure or preserve the stability, security, authenticity and uniqueness of the tradition. Such religious beliefs must be maintained as they are like a thread in a garment, interwoven and intertwined throughout the tradition and thus if they were lost, damaged or discarded over time the strength and shape of the tradition would be altered. However, only foundational beliefs need to be maintained as these serve as the theological foundations of the tradition. Peripheral beliefs that develop over time and in particular contexts may change or even be discarded without jeopardising the stability of the tradition, though this may be disconcerting to some members of the tradition.

Example 2

Religious traditions need to maintain continuity of religious beliefs to remain consistent and valid in their teachings and interaction with society. This is essential for the foundational and distinctive beliefs of the tradition although peripheral or subsequent beliefs may not be continued. Religious traditions must maintain continuity of their distinctive beliefs because as an institution representing faith truth, traditions have the responsibility to uphold their insights into divine truth. In addition religious traditions must maintain continuity of such religious beliefs because they give the tradition its unique identity amongst other religions. Furthermore the maintenance of such beliefs ensures the physical survival of the tradition and its ability to contribute to the ethical and spiritual life of the wider society.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	12	17	23	23	24	2.3

It was not necessary to make the distinction between internal and external sources in answering this question. Broadly, sources could have been a political, economic, philosophical, scientific, technological, gender or sexual movement in society that challenges the beliefs, ethics, practices or authority of a religion. Other possible sources included:

- A person or small group presenting critical or opposing viewpoints to the traditional, official or orthodox teachings and practice, thereby threatening harmony within the tradition.
- A historical event that brings into question some belief, practice, ethical teaching or structure in the religion or even threatens the existence of the religion.
- An issue from within the tradition that causes dissent or even schism.
- An issue in wider society that brings disagreement and potential disharmony within the tradition, between the tradition and the wider society, or between religions in the society.
- An issue in one religious tradition that has some form of negative impact on the attitudes, beliefs, practices or existence of another religion.

Some students named an example to illustrate their point, but this was not necessary. An example alone was not sufficient to answer the question.

Many students answered this question well, though some responses did not contain sufficient detail. Vocabulary needed to be more precise to convey meaning more clearly.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Historical challenges may arise when individuals lack confidence in or are suspicious of religious authorities causing them to attack the leadership or other parts of the tradition. The misinterpretation of the beliefs or other aspects of a religion may cause adherents to develop heretical ideas challenging the tradition. The lack of leadership and commitment to the teachings and ethics of the tradition may lead to adherents questioning the relevance of the religion to their lives and to a weakening of the social structure of the tradition. In addition the death or rise of a religious leader can cause splits within the tradition and destabilisation of the tradition.

Example 2

Historical challenges relate to events, ideas and forces which confront, disturb or test a tradition. The sources of these challenges may be external such as the breakdown of law and order within the society in which the tradition functions, or the rise of a pivotal societal leader who may outlaw rituals or practices, or scientific knowledge that gives alternative understandings of

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existence. Other challenges may arise from internal sources such as the death, natural or by assassination of a religious leader thus jeopardising the stability of the tradition. Or there may be the exacerbation to religious harmony of schisms or rival denominations within the tradition.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	11	22	26	22	10	5	3

This question required students to show broad knowledge of the types of responses used by religious traditions in modern society. It was not a question about the processes for maintaining continuity of beliefs (Area of Study 3.2), though such strategies may also be used by religions in dealing with contemporary situations.

Possible responses included:

- Religious traditions may respond using new social and more traditional media.
- The tradition may release press or social media documents stating their beliefs and their vision for the society, which will provide evidence to overcome the challenge or criticise the challenge to present the views of the tradition.
- Leaders/teachers of the tradition may meet formally to discuss the belief or practice being challenged, and formal documents explaining the position of the tradition may be released to the members and to the public.
- Organisations that work under the auspices of the tradition may be created to respond to the challenge by working towards establishing the vision the tradition holds for human society.
- The tradition may remove itself from the challenge by ignoring it, refusing to comment, or even attempting to silence its members from discussing or actively responding to the challenge.

Some students noted that the claim of no response is in fact a response, and may be a very powerful one.

Some students struggled to convey enough information about the two different ways to gain full marks, and others only explained one way in their response.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Religious traditions may respond to challenges in modern society by two different ways of engaging in the debate over the social or moral issue. They may express criticism of current or proposed practice and present their ethical stance through taking part in political action such as protests, media campaigns or boycotts. In doing so traditions are able to raise greater awareness of the issue while also voicing their opinion to a larger audience. However such methods can be counter-productive as they open the ethical principles and moral judgement of the tradition to wider critical evaluation. Religious traditions can move their participation in debate on issues from criticism to creative thinking, proposing alternative policies or practices and the strategies to achieve them. They could also contribute to the resources to achieve the alternative outcome. This may involve the tradition offering pastoral action and social services such as education networks, hospitals and care centres. This way of response is often effective since society cannot dispute the benefits of such assistance.

Example 2

Whilst there are many variations in the ways religious traditions may respond to challenges from modern society two overall ways are based on denial or acceptance of the challenge.

Some religious traditions may choose to ignore the pressures of modern society and its challenges with the hope that they will disappear or cease to remain relevant or an issue. In this way the religious tradition may choose to as well isolate themselves from the surrounding modern society in order to avoid all potential instances of a challenge arising.

However a religious tradition may respond in a completely opposite way to this, by wholeheartedly embracing the new or different perspective, ideals or views and the challenges of these advocated by the modern society. This response may include changing of certain aspects of the tradition to align with modern, pluralist tendencies which the religion sees as relevant and positive to the nature of the tradition at the time.

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Section B

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	6	12	19	18	19	10	11	4	2	3.4

Many students misinterpreted this question. At times factors were simply listed, and their relevance to the purpose of maintaining continuity of particular beliefs was not explored. Some responses did not identify a religious tradition, and in other responses there was no particular belief stated. This question asked students to describe either internal or external factors, not both. Some students included tradition-specific examples to indicate these factors, though this was not necessary.

Responses for internal factors:

- Often challenges are brought about by factors within the tradition that lead the tradition to examine its beliefs in order to maintain continuity.
- Such challenges can include heretics (proclaiming alternative understandings of a belief).
- Ensuring the tradition's continuance may mean engagement with a changing world (by various methods of reaffirmation).
- Unrest and uprising by adherent(s) (where individuals or groups within the tradition protest against its teachings or practices).

Responses for external factors:

- factors in the wider society, which may include the teachings of other traditions, religious and secular (appearing to be in contradiction with those of the tradition, requiring reaffirmation in some form of the tradition's beliefs)
- violence against the tradition (which may lead to applying a reaffirmed belief to new circumstances)
- ethical thinking and knowledge or conceptual changes to society and education of wider society bringing about the need to reformulate the expression of beliefs.

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

The destruction of the first Temple, 586BCE and the subsequent exile to Babylon was an external factor that promoted action to maintain continuity of belief in the centrality of the Land of Israel. The destruction of the Temple, the epicentre of Jewish life and the subsequent exile in Babylon threatened the ideal of living in the promised homeland of Israel according to God's law. The prophetic leaders and the remaining Priestly leaders of the exiled people set about encouraging the people to remember their covenant history and compiled and created the collection of writings of this history to maintain their religious identity amid the alternative religious practices of Babylon. And later the growing Diaspora, following the Roman conquest of Judea and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE again resulted in the deportation of Jewish communities into exile, this time with no apparent hope of foreseeable return to the Land or the religious focus of the Temple. The importance of this is captured in the words of Professor Elizer Schneid, "it is the holy land and only in it will the nation achieve worthiness such that the Lord will dwell in its midst". The enforced Diaspora threatened Jewish adherents' ability to fulfil the covenant God made with Abraham including the law of the land, Mitzvot Hatlysof Ba'aretz. Thus Jewish Rabbis sought out methods to ensure the continuity of the Jews' devotion to the Land, and their Laws in the absence of the Temple and in exile from their promised land.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Average
%	7	8	13	12	11	9	12	8	8	5	5	2	2	4.8

Students needed to use the correct terminology of 'aspects'. They needed to mention more than one aspect, and each aspect mentioned had to link directly to the specific belief and to the maintenance of its continuity. The particular belief had to be clearly stated in correct theological terms. Responses needed to move beyond the descriptive to explain in particular how the aspects were used to maintain continuity of the specific belief selected.

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

Following the destruction of the First Temple in 586BCE the social structure of religious inspiration and leadership in Judaism set about re-establishing confidence in the Covenant relationship with God. The Prophet Ezekiel preached "For I will take you from among the nations and gather you out of all the countries and bring you into your own country" (36:24). The Prophets also reformulated for the context of exile, the expressions of yearning and lamenting for a return to the Land, "By the rivers of Babylon where we sat down and we wept when we remembered Zion" (Psalm 137:1-6).

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After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE and the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire, the social structure of Judaism was again used to re-establish confidence in the tradition. The Rabbis subjected the beliefs of the tradition to internal assessment, discussion and theological reflection. The Rabbis were challenged with how to sustain the people's faith in the Divine Covenant and the Election as the Chosen People. In order to do this the Rabbis reinforced certain aspects of the religion and reformulated and reinterpreted others to ensure the continuity the people's faith in their Covenant with God. They reinterpreted the belief in the Covenant, broadening it to include messianic redemption providing adherents with hope that they would return to Israel. The Rabbis reinterpreted the ritual of worship from the sacrifice in the Temple to set prayers in the Synagogues to allow those in the Diaspora to continue worshipping God through such tangible expressions. They created 'portable Judaism' as the prayers could be said wherever they gathered, (Jewish historian Max Diment). The belief in Halacha (God's revealed Laws) was reaffirmed through applying them to the new circumstances of the Diaspora. This was achieved by insisting that the oral law was intrinsic to the fulfilment of the Covenant. Thus Jews could be guided by the written and the oral traditions of the Law.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	34	32	28	1.8

Some students performed well on this question. Low-scoring responses provided only lists of challenges without explaining their direct link to the particular tradition. Some answers contained very specific examples, while others were broader. Students needed to include a descriptive statement to indicate the nature of the challenge, such as:

- attitudes and practices towards sexual and contraceptive issues that challenged the religion's ethical positions
- economic practices that challenged the social ethics of the religion relating to the dignity of people
- changing societal attitudes to the rights, dignity and responsibility of care for the poor and needy
- ideologies, philosophies or medical practices that challenge the religion's beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life.

Single words were not sufficient as answers.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Scientific development especially in the gene industry is challenging as it may oppose religious beliefs regarding human dignity. In addition the rise of secularism is a challenge since religious traditions are marginalised from debate, thereby being perceived as insignificant in society. Finally the glorification of materialism by western media is challenging because it contradicts ethical principles of altruism and simplicity that most religious traditions uphold.

Example 2

The disenchantment of adherents with the leadership, the discrepancy between ethical principles and practice and interpretations of beliefs is a contemporary challenge that faces religions in a pluralist society.

Religions are engaged with the competition between religious values and lifestyle with a materialistic and secular society.

Rapid sociological change and technological and scientific developments also challenge the understanding of the meaning and purpose of life and how to live it held by religions.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	21	34	26	13	2.2

Students needed to explore how modern society often confronts religious traditions with attitudes, beliefs, principles and values that contradict or are in tension with those of a religious tradition. This means that the vision the tradition holds for its ideal society is compromised. They needed to show how the tradition was confronted or contradicted by a particular contemporary challenge, and the impact this had on the vision held for society. This could be in comparison to the impact on the wider society.

Responses required a very clear, summarised explication of the religious tradition's vision for society so that the how and why of the conflict between the different views of the wider society could be clearly demonstrated.

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The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

In Western, democratic and pluralistic societies the evolution of social norms has seen the increasingly widespread acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. This has presented Judaism with the challenge of how to respond to the members of its community who are homosexual and who demand to be given full participation in their tradition. Judaism has upheld the vision for society that says one should ‘act in the image of God’ (Gen.1:26) and thus emulate god’s moral and merciful nature. However homosexuality has not been seen to operate within Judaism’s code of morality as per the Levitical prohibition it states that, “men shall not lie with men as with women; it is an abomination” (Lev 19:21-23). Homosexuality also conflicts with Judaism’s vision for society that promotes the sacredness of marriage and procreation as stated in Genesis 1:28, “be fruitful and multiply”.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	9	15	15	18	15	13	6	5	3.9

The challenge and the tradition needed to be clearly represented in answers to this question. Specific examples were often used, such as the use of traditional and social media releases, formation of action groups, clerical statements, changes to aspects (e.g. ritual), social justice statements and protests.

Students needed to do more than present a list of how the religious tradition responded. The main ways had to be elaborated on with specific information that related directly to the tradition’s particular response(s). Students needed to provide a documented response of the tradition, not just an opinion. High-scoring students provided sources and quotations to support their claims.

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

The Jewish religious tradition has responded to the issue of homosexuality due to the demand of homosexual adherents for full acceptance and participation in their tradition, in a dichotomy of ways. An extreme response of Orthodox Judaism is to encourage homosexual adherents to reject or deny their sexual orientation to avoid breaking Jewish Law. Totalling rejecting homosexuality some Rabbis believe that same sex attraction can be treated or modified through the use of particular therapies. The 2011 public statement, The Declaration of the Toran Approach to Homosexuality, “rejects the notion that a homosexually inclined person cannot overcome his or her own desire”. So on that understanding they encourage homosexual adherents to be a part of all Jewish aspects of life. On the other end of the spectrum of responses within Judaism, Rabbi Yankowitz, a social justice activist in the USA openly advocates for the legalisation of same sex marriage and full acceptance of homosexual adherents in Jewish communities. He states, “denying gay people the right to marry and to worship in their religious community is contrary to basic justice and thus contrary to Jewish ethics”. The Reform movement within Judaism changed the normative stance on homosexuality, viewing the relationships as viable and wholly accept homosexuals into the religious community. Reform felt that Tikkun Olam, the repair and refinement of the world, was better achieved through acceptance, focusing on principles of social justice. The Conservative movement within Judaism had a splintered response. One policy accepted homosexuality as a viable alternative focusing on the principle of human dignity, even allowing homosexuals to become Rabbis. The other policy of the Conservative movement completely rejected the condoning and acceptance of homosexuality according to the Levitical prohibition. Yet they display utter respect for homosexual persons and encourage their participation in Jewish aspects of life.

Question 2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	8	17	26	29	15	6	2.4

Students needed to consider the effectiveness of the responses both within and outside the tradition, and had to give more detail than simply a global claim. They needed to provide details of the response in their discussion of its effectiveness. Their evaluation of the effectiveness of the response should have contained some supporting evidence. Students could also have argued that the religious tradition’s response made no difference, as long as they were able to provide evidence to support this claim.

Answers should have allowed for the fact that differences may yet be seen because the interaction of challenge and response is a work in progress. There may be differences in the effectiveness of the response and the ability to gauge its effectiveness according to where the challenge and response have occurred.

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

The responses of the religion have had some impact on the contemporary challenge within Judaism, in that generally homosexual adherents are not shunned from the community. They remain within Jewish culture and feel more able to acknowledge their sexuality. According to Orthodox Rabbi Shami Caplan “they (Orthodox) have progressed in the sense that they take it more

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seriously". There is even a homosexual Orthodox Rabbi, Rabbi Greenberg. Yet given their stance on homosexuality, that it is not an option and can be denied, as outlined in the previous answer, there must still be tensions and difficulties for Orthodox homosexual adherents. The Reform movement has made a more substantial difference to the acknowledgement and acceptance of homosexual adherents, including Commitment Ceremonies. The Reform movement has also worked with the wider society to lobby for rights to be legally acknowledged. There is now much tension within and between denominations of Judaism due to the varying levels of acceptance of homosexuality in general and of homosexual adherents in the particular communities.

Section C – Essay

Question chosen	none	1	2	3
%	1	18	52	29

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	2	2	2	3	7	6	7	7	10	7	9	7	8	7	6	4	3	2	2	1	1	9.3

Question 1

Students who responded to this question presented comprehensive, high-quality responses that demonstrated sound theological knowledge and used source material appropriately with accurate referencing. Some definitions of and beliefs about the ultimate reality of the religious tradition studied were too brief and understated, which did not set up an adequate foundation for the development of the essay. The lowest-scoring responses were those that discussed the question from a general perspective or from a personal viewpoint rather than directing the response through the beliefs and teachings of a particular religious tradition.

- Responses should have named the tradition and outlined the main beliefs about ultimate reality.
- Responses should have clearly shown how putting these beliefs into practice through the aspects of religion will guide adherents to a way of life that provides some, if not all, the answers to the questions about existence.
- High-scoring responses expanded on the link between the aspects and the belief about ultimate reality, giving adherents a system of belief to help explain the answers to the big questions.
- Some responses did not specifically name the aspects but they were recognisable within the example given.
- It was acceptable to consider that the aspects are a framework on which adherents hang the practice of their faith to support answering of the big questions.
- The key word was ‘relevance’.
- Students needed to discuss how beliefs about an ultimate reality are connected to specific questions about meaning and existence, and relationship.

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

The Christian tradition's beliefs concerning God as ultimate reality help provide meaning, purpose, clarity and guidance when dealing with the big questions of life. Beliefs regarding God's benevolence, love and compassion and the beliefs about humanity being made in the image of God help answer questions about the ultimate purpose of life and death, about how to life and how to be in relationship with others and the world. These beliefs as expressed through other aspects of religion are the framework for believers to guide them in dealing with situations that question life's directions and meaning.

The belief that God is benevolent, that God is good and seeking to show goodwill to humanity, helps Christians to develop and pursue a vision for society that is based on self giving love and service. The Christian tradition also teaches that God is transcendent yet immanent. This means that while God is beyond our limited understandings, yet God is within all parts of creation and is revealed through the mysteries and wonders of his creation. This characteristic of God helps humans to come to an understanding of God even though it is not a full understanding. Combined with the belief about God's benevolence these beliefs of God's transcendence and immanence help Christians to gain a personal understanding of God and develop a relationship with God. These beliefs about God and the personal relationship they enable humans to develop with God greatly help Christians when significant events in their lives challenge the way they had previously understood their life and God even to the point of questioning the existence of God. An example of this is in the life of C.S. Lewis. Born in 1898 into a religious family, the events in his life led him to very different views of God and life, at times rejecting God completely and at others finding God again but in new ways and with different understandings. The death of his wife Joy left Lewis struggling to see God as benevolent. Yet in dealing with his grief and his questions about God's love, Lewis eventually came to a realisation of the mystery of God's love and came to have no fear of death. As St Paul says in Corinthians, "Where O Death is your sting or your victory."

The belief in God's benevolence and creative purpose provides Christians with answers to the questions "Why are we here?" and "How should we live?" These beliefs give Christians an understanding for their purpose in life, to carry out God's creative purpose through their shared dominion with God in the care of the world and all creatures. The tradition teaches that Christians

are to be stewards of the earth, in service to God and to others. This is established in the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. This gives a purpose for human existence and a goal to be achieved and an ethical guide for acting. Christians also see God's benevolence shown in the act of God's love in giving his son for the well being of humanity. "For God so loved the world that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is a clear model for how Christians should live. It is also shown in the life of Jesus who lived out how God intended human life to be, lived in loving service of others.

The Christian tradition's belief that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God defines humanity and establishes human dignity. This fundamental understanding answers the question "Who am I?" and establishes human worth through being in God's image. In modern society contemporary social issues and movements can challenge a Christian's understanding of who they are and their purpose. For example the emphasis on consumerism does provide meaning through materialistic gain and the status it brings but for Christians this is a superficial gain and worth. The teachings of Jesus in the Gospels emphasise that true worth is found not in things but in doing good. "Do not store up earthly treasures".

Question 2

In general, this question was well answered. Students could have responded in total agreement, or partly or completely in the negative. The majority of students answered this question. The description of how people dealt with their significant life experience was generally good. However, the explanations of how their religious beliefs were affected were not sufficient, and most responses consisted of generalised claims. Appropriate referencing was used by most students, though with varying degrees of application to the point being made. Some responses needed to show more careful selection of material to consistently address the various elements of the question asked.

Some students were hindered in their response because of inappropriate choices of the individual studied. Scriptural characters such as Noah and Jonah were not able to fulfil the requirements of the study design. Similarly, if Paul of Tarsus was used he needed to remain firmly within the Jewish tradition, albeit with thinking that was challenging to the tradition. Students studying Paul for Area of Study 3.3 needed to have more diverse and substantial reference material to avoid simplification of Paul's theology and to ensure he was placed within the first-century context of Judaism that included the followers of the Way – that is, Jesus's believers.

Students should have briefly outlined (no more than an introduction) the person or group, the tradition and the significant life experience. This brief biographical detail was necessary to understand the subsequent discussion.

However, the focus of the question was on the interplay between the role of religious beliefs when confronted by significant life experience, and the impact of that experience on the previously held beliefs and understanding of them. This theological and interpretative content was where many students needed to expand their research. The use of supportive evidence to show such change needed further attention from most students.

Responses also needed to include some discussion as to whether the understanding of the particular religious beliefs both prior to and after the significant life experience was in keeping with the teaching and interpretation of the religious tradition.

High-scoring responses clearly addressed the two contentions of the question. They discussed the way beliefs provide people with coping mechanisms, and considered that, for some, or in some situations, beliefs do not help people cope. The second contention of the question required students to discuss what happens to the religious beliefs of the person or group as a consequence of the significant experience.

The following extracts are from an example of a high-scoring response.

A significant life experience is founded on the concept that throughout one's lifetime an event, or series of events may occur which have intense, life altering impacts. Religious beliefs can provide an individual with strength to deal with these transformative experiences. However the opposite may be equally true. Religious beliefs may lend no support to help an individual overcome such challenges. Due to the inextricable interconnectedness between significant life experiences and religious beliefs, an individual's beliefs and understanding of those beliefs may be altered. Whilst religious beliefs can be affirmed even strengthened from these experiences and individual's beliefs and previously beloved precepts may be splintered, thrown into disarray. However the extent to which one's beliefs and understanding of these beliefs is impacted upon is dependent on the experience an individual faces; one's faith is not always strengthened in light of a significant life experience.

The horrific experiences of death and suffering faced by Elie Wiesel is indicative of the ways in which one's religious beliefs can be destabilised rather than strengthened when confronted by a challenge. Such destabilisation does not give a person strength but confusion and uncertainty.

Born in 1928 in Romania to an Orthodox Jewish family Wiesel “learnt love of God from his mother”. His memoir ‘Night’ (1958) as well as his essay, ‘The Death of My father’, explore the unfathomable tragedy which became the significant life experience for many suffering European Jews; The Holocaust. Wiesel’s nightmarish experience throughout Auschwitz, Buna and Buchenwald concentration camps exposed him to a world of inconceivable death and suffering. Rather than finding in his religious beliefs support, guidance and strength, Wiesel found questions. Consequently rather than giving him strength to overcome his ordeal his questions created an additional degree of confusion. His religious beliefs were weakened as a result.

Prior to his experience Wiesel’s foundational beliefs reflected the fundamental precepts of Judaism. He ‘believed profoundly’ in a singular, covenantal God who assured a protective relationship with the Jewish people. His ‘love of God’ suggests he recognised the existence of a benevolent omnipotent deity who cares for his creations. This fundamental understanding is reflected within the sacred text of Exodus as it says ‘the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, abundant in goodness and truth’. Similarly in line with his Orthodox Jewish origin Wiesel would have recognised that death is merely the cessation of physical life, that death is an uncontrollable phenomenon which is part of the divine plan as ‘to everything there is a season, a time to be born and a time to die’ (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Maintaining that ‘God’s breath shall not abide in man forever’ (Genesis 6:3), Wiesel would have recognised man’s mortality and accepted it as such. However rather than gaining strength from his religious beliefs, Wiesel’s beliefs were shattered and his understanding of life, death and God destabilised.

...Wiesel could not understand how the God of his people could remain silent in the face of the ongoing horror of the camps. Wiesel questioned why God did not honour his covenantal obligation to protect his chosen people, even when they were faithful to him. In an attempt to make some sense of what was happening, Wiesel embarked on a theology of protest. This is evidenced as he witnessed the excruciating death of his father, ‘his face...swollen, bloodied, frightful...he agonised in silence’. Wiesel stated that he believed that his father’s soul returned to the ‘wrong God’ an ‘impotent God’. Additionally Wiesel rejected the Tzidule Hadin through his refusal to say the Kaddish, the prayer of praise, which previously he would have believed would give him strength to persevere through such a tragedy. Wiesel states that ‘perhaps someday, someone could explain to him how on the level of man Auschwitz was possible, but on the level of God it will forever remain the most disturbing of mysteries’. Wiesel’s understanding of a merciful God was shattered rather than concentrated or enhanced and he found no solace in the God of his upbringing.

...Wiesel’s God of justice was replaced with an unfeeling God who appeared unaffected by the suffering of his chosen people.

...Due to the broad variety of significant experiences an individual may face throughout their lifetime, ranging from joy and wonder to suffering and death, it is not inherent that religious beliefs will always provide an individual with the support to understand, cope or overcome the experiences that awaits them. Whilst in some instances religious beliefs may be affirmed or understanding of them may be deepened or strengthened. In other experiences one’s faith may be challenged to the point of crisis. For Wiesel his religious beliefs provided him with little strength in overcoming his experiences of suffering and death. Yet disillusioned as he was with his earlier beliefs about God, Wiesel remains a believer in God. Wiesel states, ‘You can be a Jew with God, you can be a Jew against God, but you cannot be a Jew without God’. So irrespective of Wiesel’s intense crisis of faith he remains staunchly Jewish.

Question 3

While students study in detail one historical challenge within Area of Study 4.1, the case study is within the overview of the broader nature of challenges to religion in general and to the particular religion(s) studied. The evidence for this broad study of religion and challenge was lacking in many student responses. Responses generally did not provide historical context for the particular example, which was described rather than discussed.

Many students responded in a formulaic manner rather than discussing the question and its stimulus material as presented. A number of these responses conflated the language of Area of Study 3.2 with a historical challenge from Area of Study 4.1, but this was inappropriate and led to low-scoring responses that did not address the question adequately.

Very few students addressed the term ‘usual tendency’ in this question.

The highest-scoring responses interacted with the quotation while using the content studied to discuss the question. Details were precise and accurate. Quotations and referencing were consistently and appropriately placed within the responses, clearly reinforcing the points already made by the student. Introductions were substantial, establishing clearly positioned statements on the claims in the stimulus material and establishing how the student intended to answer the question.

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Students should have provided an overall picture of way(s) change has manifested in the religious tradition and established whether or not, or to what extent, those ways support the claim of the stimulus statement. The historical challenge selected should have been significant to the religion and the reasons for this should have been given. Answers should have recognised some of the diversity of response within the religious tradition and students should have referred in detail to at least two aspects of religion.

Students could have agreed or disagreed in part or completely with the stimulus statement. Whichever position they took, students should have carried this position through in reasons and evidence based on the particular example. The historical/social context of the challenge needed to be set briefly.

Responses should have shown change or lack of change to more than one aspect of religion, giving reasons for this and providing supportive evidence.

High-scoring answers teased out the idea that within the religious tradition studied there were a range of responses to a challenge from those advocating retention of the status quo to those arguing for a radical reformulation or even rejection of traditionally held positions.

The highest-scoring answers consistently or substantially referred to the stimulus statement in relation to the point they were making.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

Throughout history the Catholic Church has been challenged many times. Arguably most significant challenges have been sociological and societal shifts that pose threats to the Catholic tradition. Vatican I was a response to dramatic change in the social structures of Italy and the Church's reaction was to resist all change. In contrast almost a century later Vatican II responded to such change with significant action that embraced a time of transformation. Both responses, though completely different, consisted of active reactions to change.

The Risorgimento of 1848 was the reunification of Italy under Garibaldi and perceived as a threat to Catholic structure. The only obstacle in Garibaldi's way was papal authority and in 1860 when the Papal States were seized, Pope Pius IX transformed himself into an arch conservative self imposed 'Prisoner of the Vatican', growing increasingly resentful of the loss of papal power and the assassination of his Prime Minister. It was not long after when Pius released a document named 'Quanta Cura' attached to the 'Syllabus of Errors'. Not only did these documents oppose all 'isms' (movements such as pantheism materialism, atheism) but it denied that the Pope should ever adhere to 'progress, liberalism or modern civilisation', nor should he conform to the 'spirit of the times'. Vatican I was called in 1869 and not only did it release a document 'Dei Filius' which emphasised the Church's rejection of any other way of life other than Catholicism, but also more significantly the document 'Pastor Aeternus' which declared papal infallibility. This stated that when sitting in the Chair of St Peter, the Pope's words were 'unreformable'. Not only was this projecting a sort of papal royalty but it was an extreme interpretation of the sacred text of St Matthew 18 "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church". Emphasis of such a hierarchy created more 'God fearing' adherents as the triumphalist nature of the response describing the 'exaltations of the Catholic religion' left many un-questioning adherents that would not oppose papal decisions in fear of being declared 'anathema'.

Similarly rapid change in a post world war society that had grown increasingly materialistic by the 1960's prompted the unexpected response of Pope John XXIII as he called Vatican II. Many adherents were growing increasingly distant as the invention of the television and societal change shifted focus away from the Parish as the centre of social life. John XXIII elected as a transitional Pope announced a second Vatican Council denoting his belief and desire for great change. He addressed certain 'prophets of doom' in the Vatican who lacked 'prudence and judgement' in the growing need for change. Describing Vatican II as a 'council of opportunity' he used the metaphor of 'throwing open the windows' of the Catholic religion to embrace change, describing the need for 'aggiornamento' to keep up to date. He asserted that this must be done through the revision of sacred texts and other religious writings by exercising 'ressourcement' which was the return to original theologies, liturgy and biblical works to remind adherents of the pure message of Jesus. A document released 'On the Sacred Liturgy' completely transformed adherents' religious experience and spirituality as well as the rituals by introducing the vernacular, bringing the altar forward to face the congregation and encouraging more active participation in the Mass including the singing of the congregation, rather than a special choir. As well as this, social structures were shifted with a document 'On the Apostolate of the Laity' which encouraged lay involvement in mass, in the responses as well as scripture readers and special ministers of the Eucharist. New meaning and understanding was brought into the lives of adherents with a more intimate relationship with God being encouraged. Even though the Council underestimated the psychological and anthropological bind against change in the Church, (as evidenced in the large group led by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre that broke away from the Church to form the so called 'Old Catholics') a large majority of Catholics found great renewed meaning in the changed Church.

The Catholic Church has been confronted with and stimulated by significant pressure to change over time and both these examples sit in stark contrast to each other as ways of responding. Neither example shows any tendency to do nothing as suggested in the quotation.

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Both Vatican I and Vatican II were drastic in their actions and cannot be accused of remaining sedentary as both reactions had significant immediate and ripple effects. Vatican I was an extreme defence mechanism against perceived external threat and Vatican II was a largely positive embracing of changing times. Although Vatican II aimed to eliminate the papal hierarchy that Vatican I imposed and emphasised, the Catholic Church still struggles today with continued distance from the spiritual needs of many adherents, even as Pope Francis tries to take remedial action urging his bishops to know 'the smell of your lamb' and emphasising a faith that does justice.