

2015 VCE Religion and Society examination report

General comments

In the 2015 Religion and Society examination, many students provided precise and controlled responses. These responses included relevant material, used supportive quotations that were applied effectively and included dates and brief contexts. Accuracy of relevant factual detail was good across all levels of response. This indicated good familiarity with the key knowledge and key skills of the study design.

Students demonstrated the ability to select appropriate material related to the question rather than trying to write everything they knew on the topic.

Responses indicated that students and teachers had read previous examination reports. However, the ability to answer the specific question asked requires improvement. Throughout Units 3 and 4, students should practise recognising the various parts of a question and planning their response.

Analysis requires students to question the material used and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the statements and actions being studied. Resources that offer alternative views and interpretations on a topic may assist students to develop this skill.

Specific information

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

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

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

Section A

In this section, the majority of students recognised that the questions required generic responses and were not tradition-specific. Unless the question specifically asked for a tradition example, students should have answered from the general perspective of religion and society.

Most students answered this section fully.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	10	19	37	34	2

This question asked for three possible ways in which significant life experiences relate to religious belief. Most students answered precisely, clearly and correctly.

Possible responses included:

- They provide a reason for belief.
- They help provide meaning or justification for actions, events or happenings.
- They help to find personal meaning (for example, through miracles and conversion or life-changing experiences).
- They provide sources of inspiration and solace, with the ability to stabilise members in times of crisis.
- Significant life experience and religious belief are often interconnected, each influencing the other.
- Depending on the type of significant life experience (for example, an experience of wonder and awe or an experience of extreme grief), the impact of the experience may cause the religious beliefs to be strengthened and upheld or weakened, even abandoned.
- At a time of significant life experience, religious beliefs may allow the adherent to gain insight into the meaning of the situation, thereby reinforcing, even strengthening, the beliefs or coming to acceptance of a belief formerly not understood, ignored or rejected.
- A significant life experience may challenge the believed truth of a religious belief.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

A significant life experience of a negative nature may cause individuals to question their religious beliefs and consequently turn away from them and perhaps the whole tradition. However a positive significant life experience could have the opposite effect introducing an individual to new understandings of their religious beliefs. Or adherents could have their religious beliefs affirmed and strengthened as a result of positive or negative significant life experiences.

Example 2

Both positive and negative significant life experiences have the power to strengthen religious beliefs, such as the experience relating to the belief in a way that it supports its validity. However the experience could also weaken the belief if it instead contradicts it, hence also posing a negative relation to beliefs. Another way significant life experiences relate to religious beliefs includes the belief itself impacting the experience; such as if the belief was the catalyst for the experience, as in the case of religiously based persecution. Significant experiences and religious beliefs hence are interrelated with each other.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	6	35	40	19	1.7

Question 2 required students to give a brief description of the connections between religious beliefs and rituals. Low-scoring responses included vague, repetitive statements that provided a tradition-specific example and did not explain the relationship to the ritual/belief.

Possible responses included:

- Rituals are an expression of religious beliefs.
- Rituals enact beliefs.
- Rituals are repeated reminders of beliefs.
- Rituals allow for tangible acknowledgment and participation in the religious beliefs.
- Rituals help develop individual understanding of religious beliefs.
- Rituals are a way for believers to find personal meaning in the beliefs.
- Rituals are ways of forming and developing individual identity.
- Rituals are ways of connecting with the whole tradition, establishing a communal identity.

- Rituals are ways of being socialised into the religious tradition.
- Religious beliefs and rituals can become disconnected, with rituals becoming important for socialisation within a religious community but not representing actual acceptance of the associated religious beliefs.
- Rituals are formulated as ways through which adherents can express their belief in a uniform, repeated pattern. The rituals give the belief meaning, enabling adherents to practise their belief – rituals are beliefs in action. Additionally, rituals are able to change, enabling beliefs to be maintained as the expectations, values, ideas and acceptable manners of expression in society change.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Within a religious tradition a ritual is a formal practice that facilitates spiritual connections and acts as a means of affirming an adherent's relationship to their faith by validating the related beliefs. Rituals can also be seen as physical extensions of religious beliefs - a way for adherents to express their beliefs in their everyday lives. Through constant ritualistic practices, such as prayer, meditation, mantras or sayings, an individual may develop a spiritual maturity thus gaining a deeper understanding of their religious beliefs.

Example 2

The connection between religious beliefs and rituals is that rituals serve as the concrete expression of religious belief. Religious beliefs are abstract ideas and therefore require faith. The way in which people express their beliefs and pay honour and respect to them is through rituals. Rituals are a physical manifestation through word, symbolic action, sound and silence of religious beliefs. People participate in rituals in order to be reminded of their beliefs, to reaffirm their beliefs, to strengthen their beliefs and to feel closer and more connected to their beliefs.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	6	22	31	27	13	2.2

Question 3 required students to explain briefly two ways in which religions use sacred texts and other religious writings to maintain continuity of religious beliefs. Low-scoring responses lacked sufficient knowledge of 'other religious writings'. High-scoring responses stated the terms reaffirmation, reinterpretation and reformulation but did not always provide evidence of understanding those terms. When the question asked for a specific number (in this case, two), there was no need to provide more than the required number of examples.

Possible responses included:

- Both sacred texts and other religious writings reiterate, elaborate on, interpret, explain and clarify religious beliefs.
- Although they do this in different ways, they are both a source of information, insight and authority for the maintenance of distinctive religious beliefs.
- Although they do this in different ways and with different levels of authority, they provide textual evidence to reinforce and affirm religious beliefs.
- They enable believers to trace the origin and development of the theology of religious beliefs.
- Sacred texts are used as sources for other types of religious writing.
- Sacred texts can be used to provide meaning, to justify the significance of the beliefs and therefore justify why they need to be upheld over time.
- Other religious writings can be released by religious traditions to allow adherents to understand and maintain the original belief in the context of the society in which they live.

- Other religious writings such as commentaries and reflective discussions allow adherents to develop their symbolic understanding of beliefs.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Sacred texts maintain continuity of religious beliefs as they are a repository of the foundational beliefs and stories of religious traditions and enable those beliefs and stories to be passed on from generation to generation. Other religious writings offer ways that the beliefs within the sacred texts can be interpreted with new insight to apply to different times and places. These other religious writings enable the community to be aware of new interpretations and ways of understanding and applying the beliefs of the sacred texts. So continuity of religious beliefs is maintained by both the traditional form of the sacred texts and by the explanatory and interpretative role of other religious writings.

Example 2

In order to maintain continuity of religious beliefs, religions can use both sacred texts and other religious writings to educate the generations of adherents and to reaffirm the significance of the beliefs to the lives of adherents. Through encouraging the reading and reflection and citing of centuries old texts religions can demonstrate the validity that the beliefs continue to have in changing societies. Other religious writings help to put the beliefs into contemporary context; to explain and apply those sacred texts, so that adherents can understand their meaning and application in their own time and place and see how the beliefs are continuous across time and cultures in principle, if not in every detail.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	7	19	30	27	14	4	2.4

Question 4 required students to identify an aspect of religion, other than beliefs, and explain why this aspect may be challenged. Some low-scoring responses reused the aspect of sacred texts and other religious writings from Question 3. This was not the best aspect to use for Question 4, though it could have worked if the responses also demonstrated understanding of the different forms of writing referred to in that aspect. Those who knew the history of a religious tradition from their study of Units 3 and 4 chose aspects such as rituals and social structures. The aspect of symbols does not apply to all traditions and myths are too narrow, whereas it is often the aspect of ethics that is challenged and so was a suitable aspect to identify for this question.

The following points could have been made in responses and would apply to any of the aspects of religion other than beliefs. The aspect needed to be clearly identified.

- Particular expressions of the aspect (named) may be deemed outdated or perhaps culturally insensitive.
- There may be a lack of understanding or misinterpretation associated with the aspect (named) and therefore a general rejection of it or particular parts of it.
- The meaning, power, authority or value associated with the aspect (named) may lose its impact as people become desensitised, disenchanted or unconvinced of its authenticity and usefulness.

If students chose rituals, the following points could be made:

- The aspect of rituals is one that is vulnerable to be challenged because a ritual is not always fully understood by non-adherents, and thus is open to be misinterpreted and deemed inappropriate, even criminal, by the wider society.

- The traditional nature of ritual (for example, human or animal sacrifice) may mean that it becomes outdated when society changes and challenges the ritual.
- Although based on beliefs, rituals are practices. As long as they remain true to the underlying belief, the practice or actions themselves are able to be changed and so are open to various degrees of challenge.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

An aspect of religion that may be challenged is rituals due to the changing nature of societies. People may find traditional religious rituals unnecessary, irrelevant, or inconvenient, as they may be time consuming. Because of rules for participation, people may even be excluded from the ritual or feel unworthy to participate in the ritual, thus the ritual may be challenged to change in order for such people to participate again. Another reason that rituals can experience challenge is due to the complexity of the ritual. Sometimes people can misunderstand their meaning or simply feel detached from the ritual because they do not understand it and therefore do not see its significance for their lives. Another reason for rituals being challenged is because they are the physical expression of religious beliefs, so if a belief has been misunderstood, questioned or reinterpreted so will the related ritual.

Example 2

Social structures, that is, the institutions, groups, leadership, conditions for membership and participation and overall organisation of a religious tradition that enables members to unite, learn and practise the religion is an aspect that may be challenged. Changes in the social context of the religious tradition may be questioned by the wider society in which the religion exists; the value or relevance or morality of its social structure may be challenged by a society with competing or conflicting views and structures. Another challenge may arise from the destruction from external forces of a significant part of the social structure such that the whole can no longer function in the traditional way and a major rethinking of all parts of the social structure has to take place. The social structure of a religion can also be challenged from members who argue that it no longer meets its purpose, or is contracting its purpose or the underpinning beliefs of the tradition and is therefore no longer credible.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	18	29	30	14	5	2.5

This question was about the vision of religious traditions for an ideal society. It asked ‘why’ (not ‘how’) religious traditions involve themselves in contemporary society. Some students provided inaccurate responses by focusing on strategies used by religious traditions in engaging with contemporary society. Responses should have focused on the reasons for religious traditions involving themselves in contemporary society. Students are advised to practise answering questions that require a distinction between how and why questions.

Possible responses included:

- The involvement offers members of the tradition, as well as members of the society, a code of ethics by which to live, and may provide a viable alternative to what is presented in a secular society.
- Traditions have a moral responsibility to involve themselves in contemporary society when attitudes and practices in society conflict with those held by the tradition.
- In order to implement their vision for society, religious traditions may see a need to become involved in contemporary society.

- Religious traditions are able to offer members of contemporary society ways to attain meaning in their life, allowing them a framework to formulate answers to the 'big questions' of life.
- In order to secure the future of the tradition as an important element of society, traditions may see a need to become involved in contemporary society, ensuring their relevance as a way forward into the future.
- Religious traditions are a part of society and therefore may be seen as appropriately involved in the society.
- Religious traditions have a code of ethics that they may seek to maintain and reassert if threatened by ideas, developments or attitudes in contemporary society.
- Particular aspects of religious traditions may be directly contradicted or threatened, or questioned by ideas and developments in society, requiring a response from the tradition.
- Issues arising in society may highlight points of difference between religions and society, and the religions may see this as requiring a response from them to resolve the difference.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Religious traditions involve themselves in contemporary society because they have a vision for a utopian society which they need to fulfil and thus must involve themselves in contemporary society where their vision may be contradicted. Contemporary societies that are pluralistic and multicultural will by definition have a range of norms and ideas inevitably causing tension, so it is a religious tradition's duty to be involved by being instruments of peace and finding harmony amidst this tension. Religious traditions are generally concerned with 'the common good', whereas contemporary society is often materialistic and individualistic and so a religious tradition is compelled by its beliefs to act for the good of the community. Religious traditions have a strong and definite set of ethical principles and moral standards for behaviour and so are impelled to lead by example and practice acts of social justice to bring a change of heart, attitude and behaviour to the whole community, which from the perspective of the religious tradition has a lack of understanding of what it is to be human.

Example 2

Religious traditions involve themselves in contemporary society because of the potential benefits religions and societies present each other. In the case of contemporary pluralist society, where there are many competing influences, religious traditions need to be involved in order to promote themselves and gain members as well as ensuring legal safeguards that such societies provide. They also involve themselves for the purpose of expressing their perspectives, values and vision for society, that is, they try to improve society according to their views and encourage society to move in the same directions as the tradition. However this involvement of religious traditions in contemporary society could be in a negative manner if the vision and values of the religion do not meet those of society such that the religion tries to undermine the society or to impose its views, possibly causing conflict and tension.

Section B

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	3	19	38	30	10	2.3

Students were asked to examine the comments presented in the speech bubbles and describe the points being made about ultimate reality. Low-scoring responses simply restated the comments or answered the questions inside the bubbles, while some provided a general discussion about ultimate reality.

Possible responses included:

- From the first comment, establish the various understandings of ultimate reality.
- Tease out some reasons why that person often wonders about something existing beyond us, such as their experiences, their needs, fears, hopes or world view. They may also be prompted to wonder by events in their society or the world.
- Make the point that this wonder is an expression of the human need to find meaning and purpose for their existence.
- Refer to studies of religion that suggest such a need and questioning seems to have been part of the human condition across time and culture.
- The points noted above from speech bubbles 1 and 2 lead to the third speech bubble that affirms belief in the existence of some ultimate reality and that it matters.
- The second speech bubble represented the doubt, disbelief and disinterest of many humans in the possibility of an ultimate reality. Yet this person is possibly open to the idea but cannot see any need or relevance for an ultimate reality, representing the world views of the sciences, humanism, atheism or agnosticism.
- In dealing with the third speech bubble, students made clear views on why ultimate reality could matter.
- Having a concept of ultimate reality offers people a way of making sense of existence generally and of their life in particular.
- The signs that ultimate reality matters could be finding meaning and purpose and also the belief in the possibility of a better world, as well as the desirability, even responsibility, of actions to achieve this.
- The third speech bubble was definite and claims the existence of ultimate reality is obvious in all that exists.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

The first bubble expresses the natural curiosity in the existential questions about if an ultimate reality or higher being exists. The second thought bubble recognises the curiosity but struggles to find the relevance or the importance of knowing if an ultimate reality exists. The third bubble sees the world as a place made by an ultimate reality, with the world around us enough evidence of the existence of an ultimate reality and recognises the importance of such an ultimate reality, though does not explain the importance.

Example 2

Speech bubble one indicates that the individual is beginning to consider existential questions, to question the nature and purpose of human life and the existence of an ultimate reality, however they are still sceptical of the concept of a higher being and cannot yet fully grasp it. The second speech bubble demonstrates that the individual accepts the possibility of something existing beyond us, an ultimate reality, it does not really matter, it does not seem to affect the outcome of one's life, everything goes on naturally or through human action without belief in an ultimate reality. Finally the third speech bubble claims positively that there is an ultimate reality and all the signs for such surround us. This person seems to have answered existential questions through acceptance of creation of everything by an ultimate reality.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	8	13	18	19	17	13	5	3	3.9

High-scoring responses used the points made in the three speech bubbles to compare with the thinking, ideas, attitudes and beliefs of a religious tradition they had studied. Students needed to address the points made in all three speech bubbles, though not in equal proportion.

Low-scoring responses ignored the direction to use the 'points being made in the speech bubbles'. Although some of these responses provided accurate information from a particular religious tradition, they did not directly use it to answer the question. Repetitive generalisations, unrelated to any religious tradition, did not score highly, nor did responses that were written from the point of view of the student or a particularly prominent individual rather than from the authoritative teachings of a particular religious tradition.

Possible responses included:

- Many religious traditions would claim that there is a 'point' or purpose to reflecting on the existence of an ultimate reality.
- They may see praying to the unknown as an important expression of faith.
- Some religious traditions may agree with some elements of the stimulus, found in the first and third speech bubbles about the awe and wonder that is present in the natural world.
- These points (from the response to part 1a.) could have been reiterated in relation to the religious tradition, especially in its prayer life and scholarly pursuits to understand the mystery of ultimate reality.
- Some may reflect that questioning and doubt (seen in speech bubbles 1. and 2.) do not necessarily bring rejection of ultimate reality because both figures seem open to the possibility (though from different perspectives) and this search for meaning can be seen in the reflective and analytical writings of religious traditions.
- Questioning and doubt can be part of a growth and affirming process for belief in ultimate reality, as seen in the responses of religious traditions to various scientific, technological, political, philosophical, ideological and ethical developments in society.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

The Catholic Christian tradition does not wonder if there is a God, but confidently knows that there is an ultimate reality, identified as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a triune, but monotheistic understanding of God. The Catholic tradition would reject the notion of questioning whether it matters as for adherents, God gives their lives meaning and purpose, as outlined by Jesus, the second person in the Trinitarian God, in Matthew 28:36-40 as the ultimate commandment "love your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength". This gives adherents the purpose to serve God through loving their neighbour and giving dignity to themselves through being good stewards to the natural world as asked in the biblical text of Genesis. This is all confirmed in the third bubble as it agrees that it is 'possible and it matters'. It is of course possible to the Catholic tradition as in Genesis it states that humans are "created in the image and likeness of God" and again Catholicism would agree that it matters as it involves living out Jesus' work on Earth as Jesus said "all authority on heaven and earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). For the Catholic tradition life has depth and importance because its understanding of ultimate reality as God has given it and the tradition would agree that God's presence is in the world and that this presence is observable and benevolent.

Example 2

In the Islamic religious tradition the concept of and belief in ultimate reality is undeniably clear, agreeing with the statements of the third bubble. There are verses throughout the Holy Quran (the sacred text for Muslims who accept it as the undisputed word of God) that explicate belief in Tawhid (Ultimate Reality and the monotheistic nature of God), such as "Say he is your Lord and the one and only God" Quran 112:1. This specific verse demonstrates the theologically fundamental belief in the one true God (Allah). This is significant because from this verse

specifically it can be derived that adherents of Islam understand and worship God (Allah). This is because Muslims believe that Allah created all that exists and so humans have a duty to Allah. Part of that duty is as vice-regents on this earth, “Lo! I am about to create a viceroy on the Earth” (Quran 2:30) and since humans are honoured with this position they must fulfil their roles as leaders and take care of the earth and all that is in it, “Have you not seen how Allah has made all that is in the Earth subservient to you?” (Quran 22:65) Although the existential questions of bubble one would be asked by Muslims too they would be answered by Islam not with scepticism and indifference as in bubble two, but recognising that yes there is a Higher Being and acknowledging this and believing it matters as it influences how the individual lives his or her life - that is it helps them to identify the clear signs in this universe and live their life according to how it is prescribed in the Holy Quran.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	11	7	10	16	19	16	12	6	3	3.7

Responses needed to relate directly to the religious tradition used in the response to Question 1b. Precise verbs were required to explain the manner of the expression of the belief. Students could vary from the beliefs used in the response to Question 1b. Students with high-scoring responses had specific beliefs about ultimate reality in mind (whether overtly stated or implied) and this enabled them to provide specific examples of the two aspects used. Low-scoring responses were repetitive and vague, conveying little information. Many of these responses showed that the students lacked strong definitions of the aspects, and failed to provide detailed understanding of how their interrelationship worked.

Possible responses included:

- Explanation of how rituals such as formalised prayers aid communication with a supreme being.
- Description of whole rituals with formalised actions, sounds and symbols to explain how the various parts of the ritual articulate or engage members in developing understanding of the tradition’s ideas about ultimate reality.
- Reference to sacred texts, formal creeds, interpretative texts or traditional stories to explain how the theory and experience of ultimate reality is conveyed to members of the tradition.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

The belief in a monotheistic yet triune God is expressed through the actions and words in numerous rituals in the Catholic tradition. For example the ritual action of the sign of the cross and the accompanying words, silent or spoken, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” are part of formal and personal prayer and often start and end a longer ritual. Each time this is done and said it affirms the nature of God and the tradition’s belief in an ultimate reality of three coequal persons. The ritual of the Eucharistic sacrament further expresses this belief. A part of the larger ritual is Holy Communion that involves adherents receiving bread and wine that has been consecrated and is believed to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinitarian God. Receiving communion formally confirms belief in this God. The belief in God as the creator is expressed through ethical principles. The belief holds that God created humans in God’s likeness and image and therefore human life is sacred. This means in the context of ethical issues, any risks to human life must be taken into account and any action that violates human life should be rejected.

Example 2

In Islam, the concept of Tawhid refers to the Oneness of God both in the nature of Allah and the existence of only one God, monotheism. "Can there be any doubt about God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?" (Quran 14:10). Acceptance of this is a prerequisite for all other beliefs and practices in Islam - that is in order for an adherent of the religious tradition Islam to accept other beliefs and to participate in other aspects of religion. One of the main ways that this belief is maintained is through one of the basic rituals in Islam, the duty to pray five times a day. During each of these prayer times, belief in God is expressed through the call to prayer repeatedly stating "God is the Greatest" and "There is no God but Allah". This serves as a constant reminder for Muslims as they go to prayer and assists in fostering a strong connection with God. "Am I not your Lord? They said: 'Yes, we bear witness...'" (Quran 7:172) And this is what the ritual of prayer does, it bears witness to God.

The stories of Islam in the Quran, also express the belief in One God as they show how in the past the messengers and prophets of God all came to preach the same message that is finalised in the message of the Prophet Muhammad, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger."

The origin, purpose and nature of human life were also taught to the adherents of Islam in the stories of Islam. "Who provides for you from the sky and the earth? Or who owns hearing and sight? And who brings out the living from the dead and brings out the dead from the living? And who disposes the affairs?' They will say: 'God.' (Quran 10:31)

"And on earth there are signs [of God's existence, visible] to all who are endowed with inner certainty, just as there are signs within your selves?" (Quran 51:20-21)

These stories and rituals have contributed to the beliefs being instilled in the minds of Muslims and maintained in each generation.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	12	17	24	25	22	2.3

In relation to challenges, the terms 'internal' and 'external' are 'sources' rather than 'types' of challenges. Low-scoring responses included those that used those terms without elaboration of the different 'type' of internal or external challenge. One- or two-word answers were not adequate because the instruction was to 'outline'. Too many students answered this question in the same way as Question 2b., giving tradition-specific examples without stating clearly the type of challenge the example represented. This question required a general response rather than a tradition-specific example.

Possible responses included:

- The forces and challenges could be a movement, person or issue arising from within the tradition or the wider society or other religious traditions.
- From within the tradition, different interpretations of beliefs and practices may develop into heresies that threaten the integrity and stability of the tradition.
- Individuals from both inside and outside the tradition can challenge an aspect such as beliefs, rituals, symbols, texts or the authority related to social structure in order to bring about reform or restriction or bans.
- Members of a tradition can cause factionalism in the tradition over issues of leadership.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Religious traditions may be faced externally by political change. When new leaders, governments or ideologies come to power that disagree with the beliefs and values of a tradition this can be a significant challenge.

Internally a religious tradition may be challenged by heretical ideas forming within the tradition. When members begin to adjust beliefs and gain followers, their heretical views can challenge the integrity and unity of the tradition.

Example 2

The internally precipitated challenge of alternative theology that is declared heresy may cause disunity in the tradition, even break away groups and uncertainty about the right theology within the whole tradition.

Changing scientific and technological circumstances are an external challenge which may contradict some religious beliefs thereby reducing the credibility of the beliefs for adherents and challenging the tradition to respond to the questions and doubts raised.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	5	9	16	22	21	15	13	3.4

The examples of historical challenges needed to be located in a particular religious tradition, in definite times and places, and the nature of the challenge needed to be briefly yet clearly stated. Further descriptive detail was not required. Some low-scoring responses merely listed three terms or short phrases that named a challenge for the tradition, and even if they were correct they failed to outline the examples.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

In 70CE Jerusalem the Jewish tradition was faced by the external challenge of persecution. Murder and destruction at the hands of the Roman Empire destroyed the Second Temple, the focus of the tradition. "To many Jews it appeared that Judaism itself was shattered beyond repair." (Greenburg)

During the 1800sCE in Europe the Jews faced the challenge of technological advancements during the age of Modernity, undermining their beliefs.

Thirdly, from 1933-1945 the Jews faced the threat to their continued existence in Europe through the Holocaust defined as the systematic, bureaucratic state sponsored persecution and murder of approximately 6 Million Jews by the Nazi regime.

Example 2

The Islamic religion was challenged in 632CE by the death of the religious leader, the final messenger, Muhammad, as the religion was left temporarily leaderless as it debated its next rightful leader. This created a situation of uncertainty for adherents and the developing disunity allowed the potential for assault by enemies of the religion.

Between 656CE and the early 700s CE the Islamic tradition was plagued by Fitnahs, civil wars between competing leaders and their followers with assassinations of leaders, community unrest and the rise of various religious reform movements within Islam.

From 1750 on, the experience of colonisation by various Western powers brought the challenge of modernisation to Muslim countries affecting all areas of their traditional and religious based societies.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	7	5	9	12	13	15	14	11	8	4	3	4.7

This question required students to refer to a religious tradition studied and discuss the response of the tradition to a particular historical challenge, as well as commenting on the impact of that response.

It was possible and permissible for a student to use two different religious traditions for Question 2, one for part b. and another for part c., although most students used the same religious tradition.

In this question students were being asked to demonstrate their ability to select the relevant information from their wider studies. Low-scoring responses provided unnecessary, irrelevant information, often failing to address the part of the question that required comment on the impact of the response. Many students wrote lengthy descriptions of the challenge instead of dealing with this in one or two brief sentences. This left little time to deal with the question focus, which was the response of the tradition and its impact. Many students ignored the impact or covered it in one statement in an overgeneralised final sentence.

A high-scoring response to this question set out briefly the historical/social/religious context of the challenge, including dates.

Ways of responding to this question included:

- The aspects being challenged were briefly and correctly identified.
- The response(s) of the religious tradition was clearly articulated with an indication as to whether the response is official, or represents a particular group among the membership, or a combination of these. Perhaps the majority of members do not respond, ignore the response or are unaware of the response.
- The impact of the response on the various groups of the tradition were outlined and may be immediate, dramatic and important, while possibly short-lived or significantly long-lasting.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Due to the lack of a central power Judaism's response to the historical challenge of the Holocaust was multifaceted. The first response taken by many Jews following the Holocaust was to reaffirm beliefs and social structures through rebuilding communities and places of worship. This response was founded in the Jewish ethical principle to "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:14) and was carried out largely by the "shearit haplitah" which means surviving remnant. These Jews immediately began by starting families, rebuilding schools, synagogues, memorials, museums and Jewish Centres of life in what is described as an "awesome response" (Historian Mark Baker). This response has had a strong unifying impact on Jewish communities, whether religious or not, allowing for new and diverse centres of Jewish life to grow in America and Australia as the Jews moved past the horrors of the Holocaust and established their identity in new times and places. Another response taken by Jews was that of "zachor", (remembrance) which is the key point of the Jewish tradition commanded 169 times in the Torah. Zachor was taken as a response to remember the murdered but also to act as a stimulus to change, to make sure an event like the Holocaust never takes place again as stated by the Baal Shern Tov (Jewish Sage) "In remembrance lies the seed of redemption". The Jewish people decided to remember the Holocaust through Yom Hashoah (Day of

Remembrance) which has become an officially recognised day of mourning by many religious people and the State of Israel. As “forgetting is not an option” (Elie Wiesel - survivor) there is also a huge museum/memorial found in Israel called Yad Vashem as “For the living and the dead we must bear witness” (Elie Wiesel). This response has had a positive impact on allowing Jewish society to move forward while also remembering and paying tribute to the past.

Example 2

With the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632CE the Islamic faith was left with no rightful leader. Many at this time argued that Ali the son in law and cousin of Muhammad should be named Caliph. This however was disputed when Abu Bahr, companion of the Prophet, succeeded Muhammad as the leader of the religion. This decision began the first signs of a division within the Islamic tradition as those who believed in Ali began to resent those in support of Abu Bahr. In response to this growing resentment Abu Bahr declared that if he strayed from the intentions of Allah and Muhammad then the Muslim people had the right to “obey him no more.” This period however developed the lasting divide of Islam into both Sunni and Shia sects. Mike Shuster, a religious historian states that “the division of Islam into Sunni and Shia branches goes far back in Islamic history to the aftermath of the death of the Prophet Muhammad.” The differing claims of rightful leadership and organisation between the Sunnis who believe that the leader should be chosen from those who will be the best at it and the belief of the Shia who claim that Islamic leadership should follow the bloodline of Prophet Muhammad has sparked ongoing conflict and violence within the religion that continues into contemporary society with the conflicts in both Iraq and Syria. Also these current conflicts have spread their impact to Muslims and non-Muslims in other countries, increasing the potential for conflict and creating disharmony and suspicion between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Section C – Essay

Question chosen	none	1	2	3
%	1	35	48	15

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Average
%	3	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	7	7	6	8	5	5	4	3	2	2	0	0	8.8

All three questions in this section contained stimulus material. Despite this point being made in previous examination reports, many students ignored the ideas raised in the quotations, only answering part of the question that provided the prompt term connecting to a particular Area of Study. It is important that students read and answer all parts of a question.

High-scoring responses engaged with the stimulus material throughout the essay and students selectively used the material studied during Units 3 and 4.

In some low-scoring responses it was evident that material had been prepared before the examination. While these students may have covered all the key knowledge and skills for the Area of Study, they did not address the stimulus of the question.

Question 1

Many of the students who responded to this question presented high-quality responses that addressed the stimulus material and discussed the idea of crutches. While many responses simply agreed with the statement, some considered the different ways in which religious beliefs could work as temporary, long-term or permanent crutches. Some students misinterpreted the question and made no reference to a person or group, using the religious tradition instead. A few students did not nominate a religious tradition and just referred generally to religion.

- Responses should have considered the claims of the stimulus material in relation to the religious tradition and example studied. Links to this material should have been referred to consistently in the essay.
- Responses needed to make explicit the link between significant life experience and the religious beliefs that provide a framework to make sense of the experience and may offer (like a crutch) support to individuals.
- Students could have noted that religious beliefs or particular ones may not be that important to some individuals consistently in their lives but only at major events or in significant life experience, again like the supportive crutch.
- Examples may have discussed how an individual or group 'finds' faith (a support/crutch) where previously there may have been only social membership of the tradition.
- There may have been an intensified understanding and appreciation of particular religious beliefs after a significant life experience that enabled the member(s) to have a deeper understanding of the event (such as miracles and conversion examples, providing that extra support).
- There should have been quotation material from the person or group to demonstrate their movement in religious belief.
- There should have been clear historical, social and religious contexts with dates.
- High-scoring responses included the theological understanding of the official religious tradition and compared it with the understanding of the person or group before and after the significant life experience.
- While the question stated 'a person or group', it was acceptable for students who had studied more than one tradition to refer to the person/group from both traditions. The other criteria for a sound response applied to their examples.

The following are examples of high-scoring responses.

Example 1

Venerable Master Cheng Yen, a Buddhist nun, has interpreted the fundamental understandings of the Buddhist faith to establish a modern expression of the religious tradition. If this fundamental understanding was to be seen as pair of crutches we could understand that the core beliefs of the religion act as a means of support whilst adherents create their own spiritual meanings. This notion is expressed through Cheng Yen in her dealings with significant experiences in her life, showing relevance to both her path to enlightenment and to her desire to help the great family of humanity.

In 1952 when Yen's mother fell ill, Cheng Yen was exposed to the harsh reality of suffering. Her family upbringing had founded her understanding of the Buddhist faith and provided her with the 'crutches' to begin her journey of recovery from the experience of suffering. Through her exposure to the suffering of her mother, family and herself, Yen was able to form her personalised understanding of the first Noble Truth of Buddhism, that 'life is suffering'. This drew Yen closer to Buddhist ideals until 1960 when her father died from a brain haemorrhage. Yen began to question her understandings of life, reflecting on "Why life is so transient? Where then lies true meaning?" In the suffering that followed her father's death, Yen came into close contact with the Buddhist dharma values, awakening her to the third noble truth, 'suffering can be overcome'. From this point, Yen travelled to eastern Taiwan with Buddhist Master Xiudao where she vowed to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, forming the basis of her deepened understanding of Buddhism. This commitment provided Cheng Yen with the support to continue her religious development.

This fundamental understanding allowed Cheng Yen to become a Buddhist nun and she began to develop understandings of Buddhism in relevance to the changing world around her. After her ordination in 1963 Yen settled in a small town in eastern Taiwan where she taught other adherents leading them to a path towards enlightenment. This period in Yen's life allowed her to

reflect on her significant life experiences of suffering and draw new meaning from her central Buddhist beliefs, her crutches, to form the realisation that “after suffering there is sweetness”.

Three years later Yen was visited by three Catholic nuns who came to reflect on life and religion and shared their reflection that Buddhists, especially those in Taiwan, were not positioned in such a way to help others in suffering and need. They asked, “What has Buddhism done that benefits society?” Yen was propelled from her supporting crutches onto her own two feet to develop an individual spiritual meaning of her Buddhist tenets.

In forming her individual meanings Cheng Yen did rely on her crutches the basics of Buddhism, to ensure relevance and adherence to the Buddhist faith. But she now understood “that one should spread your love for your family to your society and to all of humankind. The result will be true happiness.” This prompted her to begin the Tzu Chi welfare foundation providing health care and disaster relief to those who could otherwise not afford it. In doing so Cheng Yen established a constellation of commissioners who provided financial support funding the program. This went against the Tenth Buddhist precept, however Cheng Yen, no longer totally dependent on her crutches abided by the first Buddhist belief which emphasises behaviour over beliefs. This allowed her to help the lives of thousands of Taiwanese proving that beliefs are only used as crutches whilst you are learning to walk, in Cheng’s case, while developing her understanding of her religious beliefs.

Example 2

Religious beliefs play a vital role in an individual’s understanding of a significant life experience as these beliefs are what provide a framework to guide understanding of the experience. They are what an individual will turn to in times of difficulty and in this way religious beliefs are ‘used as crutches’ to support the person. However very difficult life experiences of pain, suffering and loss may overwhelm the person such that their religious beliefs fail to be the necessary or adequate crutches they need at that time. Even so the person may still turn to these ‘crutches’ as for a believer, they are their only source of strength and support and continued dependence on them may lead to an eventual strengthening of the beliefs as they are seen as what provided recovery from the trauma of the experience. Such was the case for Christian apologist C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) who after the death of his beloved wife Joy Gresham in 1960, found that his beliefs in a good and loving God had been contradicted by her death. Initially he felt this belief was an inadequate ‘crutch’ yet he continually returned to it to try to understand the apparent contradiction and gradually gained strength from it. Grappling using this belief as a supportive crutch he was able to recover from his pain and loss. But his faith shifted from a rational, apologetic theology to one based on utter faith and submission to God, his ‘crutch’.

The response continued to develop particular stages of Lewis’s grief process and explored the metaphor of the crutches at each stage, showing how he engages with his beliefs about God as temporary and as permanent underpinnings for his world view and way of life.

Question 2

While the vision for society of the religious tradition was not specifically mentioned in the question, it was expected that responses would deal with this because it is central to how religious traditions respond. High-scoring responses incorporated vision into the discussion of the stimulus material in this question.

- Responses should have considered the claims of the stimulus material in relation to the religious tradition and example(s) studied. Links to this material should have been consistently referred to in the essay.
- The challenge should have been identified in its contemporary contexts with places and dates and circumstances as well as the nature of the challenge to the religious tradition – exactly what in the tradition is being challenged and why should have been stated.

- Diverse responses were possible and the respondent individuals or groups should have been identified, as should their role within the tradition. These details assisted students to evaluate the impact of responses more accurately.
- There should have been an evaluation of the responses on both the religious tradition and on the wider society in terms of whether or not the response(s) show that the religion is important in that society.

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

Example 1

Religious traditions often attempt to mould or transform society to achieve their vision for the ideal society. In doing so in open, direct and outspoken ways, traditions believe they are helping to make a better world to live in and see this as their way of contributing to society. But the wider society or significant groups within the society, may see such efforts of the religion negatively, as out dated thinking that has no place for consideration in the issue under discussion in society, perhaps even as contributing to social disharmony and tension. An example of this very differently perceived involvement of a religious tradition in contemporary society is the Catholic Church's responses to the issue of transgender operations.

The Catholic Church teaches that everybody is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalms 139:14) and that everything is "inherently good because they are of the Lord" (Corinthians 10:26). Thus Catholicism teaches that humans have a responsibility to uphold the sanctity of creation and this has been interpreted by some Catholics as clearly showing that transgender surgery is unacceptable as it violates creation. Those holding this view believe that changing one's body in this fundamental way goes against God's plan for humanity. Such views were expressed in 2012 by Pope Benedict when he directly addressed transgender issues by cautioning Catholics about "destroying the very essence of the human creature through manipulating their God-given gender to suit their sexual choices." In his speech by Pope Benedict stated "When freedom to be creative becomes freedom to create oneself the necessarily the maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his identity as a creature of God". Pope Benedict reiterated the Catholic tradition's belief in the sanctity of creation and thus condemned transgender surgery.

This view was highly criticised by members of the wider society where there seems to be general support for transgender surgery. The criticism accused the Church represented in the Pope's statements, as discriminatory, intolerant of difference and opposed to the value of freedom of expression. What was clear in the criticism was that there was a very different way of understanding gender. The Church in the Pope's statements sees gender as biological sexes, whereas views in the wider society see gender as "socially conditioned, malleable at will or operating on a spectrum" (The Catholic Spirit, October 2014). This shows that religious traditions may not always be seen by all as contributing a positive role in society even though it may remain an important role of alternative perspectives.

In 2013 there was another, official public response from the Church to this transgender issue. This time, the response was not to condemn transgender surgery but to tolerate it. This response of compassion was seen through a tweet of the new Pope Francis, "Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven." This time the impact of the response on the wider society was more positive, praising for the Church for taking a more accepting and inclusive position...

The very fact that the response was taken note of and commented on by various groups shows that the opinion and teachings of the Catholic Church still has influence, both positive and negative, in contemporary society. This demonstrates that religious traditions continue to have an important role in the societies in which they exist.

Question 3

While this question could have been answered from the material studied for Unit 3, Area of Study 2, students could also have referred to examples from Unit 4, Areas of Study 1 and 2.

Students could have used more than one example in their discussion, but this was not required. An analysis of the example(s) used was required.

The question allowed for the discussion of impact but this was not required.

An individual is not the religious tradition; therefore, using the response of a prominent individual from a religious tradition (such as a pope, Edmund Rice, Frederick Ozanam, Buddha or the Prophet Muhammad) was not what this question asked for; rather, it related to the response of the tradition. Certainly, a prominent individual's response could be cited as an example but just recounting one person's response did not lead to a high-scoring response to this question.

- Responses should have considered the claims of the stimulus material in relation to the religious tradition and example(s) studied. Links to this material should have been consistently referred to in the essay.
- Responses should have considered the accuracy of the claim that tension exists between preserving the status quo and the desire to adapt to changing situations and understandings (cultural adaptation). Students should have considered for whom the tension exists. They should have considered whether such tension is positive, negative or both and in what ways.
- In responding it was not enough to use the following terms: reaffirmation of beliefs, application of reaffirmed beliefs to new circumstances, reinterpretation of beliefs to address new circumstances, reaffirmation of beliefs through reformulation of their expression. These are not simply interchangeable terms. One or some of them would apply to the various examples used in responses.
- Whichever of the terms was used, it needed to be explained and the example(s) used should have showed how that way of response is intended to work.

The following are extracts from high-scoring responses.

Example 1

As Darwin's publication "On the Origins of Species" (1859) presented the 19th century with a theory of evolutionary development that contradicted the Western Liberalists' reading of the Biblical text genesis, the Catholic tradition had the capacity to affirm the ecclesiastical body of the church and its teachings or adapt to incorporate the new scientific ideas. The Catholic tradition engaged in a dynamic and long term process of theological and scientific discussion eventually transitioning from one form of response to another, as religious authorities took into account what was most productive and positive in the tradition. As the new scientific thoughts took greater hold on the Western world and by extension on theology, the Church had to reconcile its desire to adapt to the evolutionary theories while still preserving its religious integrity.

The Catholic Church's initial response was driven by the desire to 'remain the same'. For nearly a century the papacy offered no positional pronouncements on Darwin's theories on evolution and natural selection. This was possibly due to previous encounters with scientific defeats as experienced in the conflict with the theories of Copernicus and Galileo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Eventually this response transitioned to an outspoken and comprehensive response driven by the desire of the Church authorities to maintain the tradition's beliefs and their expressions (Vatican 1, 1860 Council of German Bishops). This Council declared that "Our first parents were made immediately by God. The opinion of those who assert that this human being emerged from the process of spontaneous continuous change of the imperfect is directly opposed to sacred scripture and the faith." This pronouncement enhanced the separation between science and the Catholic faith as the Council aimed to ban the reading of "heretical, anti-clerical, lascivious scientific discourse."...

However within the wider Catholic Church and particularly among its scientific members, there was a growing desire to accommodate the scientific theories and to adapt the teachings of the Church. But in the nineteenth century some of the proponents of such change developed wild reformulations. It was Pope Leo XIII in 1880 who acknowledged officially in an apostolic letter to the whole Church that evolution and theology were compatible in terms of creation, by accommodating the biblical reference to the creation of Adam from the slime of the earth as metaphorically consistent with evolution. Nearly a decade later he additionally acknowledged the ability to reinterpret scripture as Holy Scripture can be explained in a number of ways. However this allowance for the possibility of other interpretations, even incorporating scientific understandings, did not come without subsequent reaffirmations of some existing teachings associated with creation. It was clearly stated in an encyclical of 1893 that evolution did not provide an acceptable explanation for time nor for the special creation of humans by God. But the reformulations did not stop here. During the twentieth century the Church gradually became more open to diversity of understanding about creation. Even so this increased openness came very slowly and perhaps for many in the Church and in the wider society unconvincingly.

Example 2

... Like every religious tradition, Judaism consists of a number of foundational beliefs and practices that it wishes to be kept the same yet also to be able to be adapted so they can be understood and applied appropriately in different times and circumstances. In Judaism this can be seen through the central belief of divine revelation, the idea that relates to God communicating with humanity and the Jewish people in particular, at specific moments in time. The most significant of those moments is that of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, when God is believed to have “Spoken all these words” (Exodus) and hence provided God’s will through the Torah, “every verse in the Torah is equally holy as they all originate from God” (Maimonides). This belief also connects to the belief in the divine covenant, as it is believed that God made an mutually binding agreed with the Jewish people that they would be God’s “treasured possession” (Exodus) if they kept the commandments of the Torah which includes “make for me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it” (Exodus). The practices used to express these beliefs were thus the keeping of the commandments and the expression of the belief that God was ethical and powerful which encouraged the reply “All that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Exodus). In order to maintain the uniqueness, stability and integrity of the tradition such beliefs and practices needed to be continuous. But sometimes “the same” is not an option; change is forced upon a tradition.

For example, the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE in Israel brought pressure to these beliefs and practices. The tradition struggled to understand how and why their good and powerful God could have allowed such a tragedy to occur. They were confused and conflict arose over how to express the beliefs and practices of the Covenant without the social structure of the Temple and the commanded ritual of sacrifice. About 150 of the 613 laws of the Torah deal with sacrifices, but the challenge was to discover how these obligations could be maintained without the Temple and the Priesthood.

Different groups within the tradition attempted to deal with these changed circumstances, one by ‘staying the same’ the other by changing the expression of the beliefs. The desire to keep things the same was followed by the remaining Sadducees who were “conservative, bordering on fundamentalist” (Pasachoff and Littman). This sect dealt with the tension between staying the same and adapting by choosing to stay the same, reasserting the beliefs of divine revelation and the practices of sacrifice as true and divinely given. While this choice did provide credibility it had no practicality as the tradition of ritual sacrifice as “the Sadducees lacked the centre of worship” (Pasachoff and Littman).

The Pharisees affirmed the belief in revelation and the covenant but recognised that the practical expression of these beliefs had to be adapted to the changed circumstances. They reaffirmed the belief using reinterpretation, and reformulation in writings and application of the beliefs to new circumstances. They stated that the traditional beliefs and practices still applied “Holiness could be found everywhere” (Rabbi Greenberg). They reinterpreted the beliefs

through introducing “Two Torahs, oral and written” (Schiffman in From Text to Tradition). The oral law explains the beliefs metaphorically rather than literally. Mostly the tradition chose to adopt this response of maintenance through adaptation. This reformulation to new circumstances included going “from Temple to houses of study and Synagogues, from Torah to Talmud and from Priest to Rabbi” (Schiffman). This was accompanied by a transformation in social structures, sacred texts and rituals as prayer was now the expression of beliefs rather than sacrifice. Thus substantially the beliefs were retained though their interpretation and subsequent understanding and expression underwent adaption.