

2016 Religion and Society examination report

General comments

The 2016 Religion and Society examination was the final examination for the current study design, and it assessed the breadth and depth of students' knowledge and understanding. The examination asked a variety of questions on aspects of religion and the methods for maintaining continuity of beliefs and most students handled these questions well. The examination also asked questions that challenged students to be quite selective and contained in choosing the appropriate material for their answers. These were discriminating questions as they focused on only one of the key knowledge points related to an area of study and required students to be analytical of the information related to that point.

Many students wrote precisely, answering within the spaces provided and not including irrelevant material. Though most students were able to read questions accurately, there were two exceptions in Section B that were answered incorrectly by many. This was due to students answering generally about beliefs when the question required a particular belief (Section B, Question 1c.) or discussing the responses of a religious tradition to a contemporary issue when the question focused on the impact of the responses (Section B, Question 2c.).

It was pleasing to see evidence of the study of more than one religious tradition in responses. The challenge for those studying two religious traditions is to refine how the material is selectively used to address questions so responses are more developed in factual and theological detail and better supported by sources and references.

It was evident that new topics are being studied in both Areas of Study of Unit 4. Also there were some very successful new case studies of individuals for Unit 3 Area of Study 3. These new selections provided clear examples to fulfil the key knowledge points and were well supported by primary source quotations. Generally, the analytical quality of responses dealing with significant life experience was detailed and appropriately supported by quotations.

There were some students who wrote from a very personal perspective with negligible reference to any religious tradition. They wrote subjectively about their faith and their views, not those of the religious tradition they may have named or religious traditions generally.

There were also many students who wrote copiously for each question, often missing the focus of the question amid excessive and largely unnecessary information.

While the theological knowledge shown was accurate and precise, many students still needed to increase their knowledge and to improve their ability to express theological ideas clearly and accurately. They also needed to develop their ability to use supportive source material.

Paucity of vocabulary was a problem for many students, and this restricted their ability to express their ideas and information clearly and precisely.

Specific information

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

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

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

Section A

In this section, conciseness and directness were the key elements for high-scoring answers. Restating or rewording the question before giving the answer was not necessary or useful, and sometimes changed the question focus.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	11	28	25	31	2.7

High-scoring answers recognised that this question focused on what beliefs did for believers. 'Ways' is a word not to be confused with 'methods', which are more specific tools for achieving a particular goal or purpose. There were many possible responses.

The question required two ways, so only the first two ways were rewarded. In a number of student answers, the two ways were variations of the same way and they were rewarded only once. There was some rewording of the question rather than answering it, which was not rewarded.

Religious beliefs help people to understand:

- their place in the world
- why they exist
- the purpose of life generally
- their particular purpose in life
- how they should live their life
- how to relate to others
- how to relate to the natural world
- how to cope with problems, disappointment, sorrow, loss, tragedy, death, joy, happiness, inspiration, success
- how to respond to the existential questions or big questions of life.

Other acceptable answers were that religious beliefs:

- inspire a sense of wonder and awe
- provide hope.

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

Religious beliefs provide an ethical and moral framework for adherents, providing them with formula to live a fulfilling life.

Religious beliefs "bring us closer towards the truth of life" (Joan Chittister, American Benedictine nun) by helping adherents answer existential questions and come to an understanding about the meaning of life.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	20	33	24	19	2.3

As in Question 1, the task was to outline two ways. Providing definitions did not attract marks because definitions did not directly answer the question. Again, the excessive number of ways given by students indicated a lack of careful reading of the question. Only the first two ways were awarded marks.

Possible responses included:

- Religious symbols are the concrete, tangible expression of the abstract ideas that are religious beliefs.
- They provide an enactment of the religious belief in visible, tactile imagery and action.
- Through engagement with the religious symbol, new or deeper insights into the meaning of the religious belief may be experienced.
- Religious symbolism promotes a vigorous sense of veneration that adds to the veracity of worship.
- Religious symbolism such as the wearing of religious symbols promotes spirituality that creates and sustains a sense of community and belonging

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

Symbols can demonstrate or make tangible an adherent's understanding of a belief.

As an aspect, symbols "create and invigorate connections and relationships with beliefs" (Daniel Gordis, American Jewish Author) by allowing believers to more fully express their belief in a visual form shared by the religious community.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	22	31	21	17	2.2

Many answers focused on the negatives of adaptation, such as *'if religions don't adapt they will be ignored'*, thus missing the focus of the question. Others emphasised the need to adapt in order to remain relevant to society, without stating why or how this contributes to the maintenance of religious beliefs. Relevance to society is not the goal.

Possible responses included:

- To maintain continuity of religious beliefs, religious traditions cannot remain static; they need to be in dialogue with the society in which they exist. This may require action on the part of the religious tradition to accommodate or incorporate such knowledge into the interpretation of religious beliefs.
- Religious beliefs develop in particular times and cultures, so as areas of human knowledge develop there may be tensions or contradictions with the existing understanding and/or expression of some religious beliefs.
- New cultural contexts may require a different expression of some religious beliefs to redress cultural unfamiliarity, misunderstanding or inappropriateness, so that those beliefs can be applied to the lives of the people in that time and place.
- The religious tradition has essential beliefs to be maintained, and in maintaining these the tradition will also maintain connection to society in order to implement its ideal vision for society.

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

Adapting a belief to new circumstances enables continuity of a belief by ensuring its relevance in a changing world and by allowing for a more thorough understanding of the belief. If a belief is adapted to new circumstances this shows that the belief is enduring because it is significant in the tradition's theology and can still provide meaning to adherents. The process of adaptation also allows for theological reflection on the belief which can bring refinement to the belief in textual expression and possibly change its expression in other aspects. All of this augments greater understanding and therefore aids continuity of belief.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	14	31	28	22	2.5

Many answers did not move much beyond the point that significant life experiences strengthen or weaken religious beliefs. There was an incorrect alignment of positive experiences strengthening beliefs and negative experiences weakening beliefs when it is often more complicated. There was no requirement to define key terms, and this was an unnecessary addition in a Section A response. Multiple reasons or fewer reasons in greater depth were both acceptable ways to respond.

Possible responses included:

- A life experience that is significant will challenge the individual's religious beliefs either positively or negatively.
- Such an experience could challenge the foundations and fundamentals of a person's religious beliefs or it may dramatically reaffirm their religious beliefs or stimulate a development of the belief.
- Such a life experience could require that the individual apply the particular, religious beliefs in order to cope with or to understand the experience.
- Such an experience might test the usefulness of the religious belief, perhaps showing to that person that it is insufficient or unacceptable for the circumstances as they understand them.

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

Significant life experiences and religious beliefs have a dynamic, symbiotic and morally interactive relationship where each can influence the understanding of the other. Experiences that are significant act as "seeds of change" (Scott Wright, Columban Priest) and hold the sovereign power in the relationship - that is, "one believes what one has experienced" (Bernard Lonergan, Jesuit philosopher and theologian). Significant experiences can have a strengthening or weakening effect on religious beliefs. However, an individual's religious beliefs can also play an important role in the perception of significant experiences and in how the individual deals with the experience. Religious beliefs can provide another way of making sense of the experience.

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	19	32	26	17	2.3

Students demonstrated that they understood the general reasons for religious traditions having a vision for society.

Possible responses included:

- The vision for society of a religious tradition is their summative expression of their important and distinctive religious beliefs.
- It is what they are required to enact in order to live true to their religious beliefs and religious tradition.
- It is the basis for the ethical teachings of the religious tradition and the moral practice of its adherents.
- It provides an ideal for which to strive.
- It is the means for transforming society for the better, according to the religious beliefs of the religious tradition.

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

A vision for society allows religious traditions to work towards a goal inspired by their religious beliefs. The vision, reflected in the texts, rituals, religious experience and spirituality of the traditions, enables them to work for the achievement of their beliefs held about the meaning and purpose of existence.

A vision for society enables religious traditions to stay relevant in their society by providing an ethical framework for all people to work cooperatively to close the existential gap between society's reality and the vision for its potential.

Section B

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	16	31	26	20	2.4

This question required an explanation of 'why' religious traditions maintain continuity of religious beliefs. Responses that dealt with 'how' this was achieved (that is, methods of maintenance) were not rewarded. Higher-scoring responses noted that not all beliefs are of similar significance in religious traditions and it is the beliefs that are foundational that require maintenance of their continuity.

Possible responses included:

- The purpose of maintaining continuity of foundational and fundamental religious beliefs is to keep the religious belief stated clearly and consistently for new generations.
- It is to enable adherents to confidently address their existential and ethical questions and moral needs.
- It is to ensure the religious tradition is addressing the needs of its adherents and of their society by appropriately incorporating new knowledge from such fields as science, technology, archaeology and sociology.
- As religious beliefs provide the foundation for the identity of a religious tradition it is imperative to maintain continuity for the fundamental beliefs.

Very few responses noted that, if there is no distinction made between the fundamental importance of beliefs then one of the purposes for maintaining beliefs is to resist criticism and obstruct development such that inadequate, superfluous and even erroneous beliefs are also maintained. However, this point was not required for a high-scoring response.

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

To ensure the survival of a religious tradition. If a significant belief (theological foundation) is not continued and maintained with integrity, the religion ceases to exist with the same identity.

To ensure the relevance of a religious tradition in a changing society. If significant beliefs are not continued and maintained so as to be understood by new generations, the tradition may be seen as out-dated, redundant, obsolete, irrelevant or wrong, thereby losing adherents and influence in society.

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	8	14	17	20	17	18	3.6

This question required students to give definitions. Examples were not required but could be used to support the definition. Without definition, examples were not rewarded.

Students who had learned the definitions answered this question well. Responses should have noted that in some way all of these terms are about affirming the relevance of religious beliefs – that is, their usefulness and importance to a religious tradition – and so each of those practices contribute to maintaining the continuity of foundational and fundamental beliefs. The highest-scoring responses noted this point.

Possible responses included:

- **New application** of a religious belief achieves the maintenance of the belief's continuity through applying the reaffirmed belief in its original form or as an adjusted belief (that is, reformulated or reinterpreted) to new circumstances brought about through developments in knowledge from areas such as science, ethics, psychology, archaeology, geology, astronomy, physics and technology.
- **Reaffirmation** maintains the continuity of a belief through a restatement of the belief without any alteration.
- Maintaining continuity of religious beliefs through **reformulation** is reaffirming the belief through some change in its expression in one or more of the aspects of religion, but the belief itself is unchanged.
- Maintaining continuity of religious belief through **reinterpretation** is reaffirming a belief through changing the emphasis or the understanding of its meaning; this will be accompanied by a change in its expression in one or more of the aspects of religion.

Points that could have been included apply across these practices, such as the following:

- A number of these practices involve reflecting upon and reconsidering how the religious belief is to be understood in the context of new times, new knowledge, and new or changed cultural circumstances.
- Such reflection may require rewording of the actual belief.
- The belief could stay with the same wording but may require rethinking of how to apply the religious belief to the lives of the tradition's adherents.
- The belief may require a reordering of related ethical principles.
- The belief may require a reinterpretation and restatement of what it means to be human, an underpinning belief for many other beliefs.
- It may require a redesign of ritual practices to more accurately reflect the existing understanding of the beliefs or the revised interpretation of the religious beliefs.

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

Reaffirmation occurs when the understanding and value of a significant belief, as revealed in the original experience/revelation/insight, is confirmed and expressed in the same way without any change to its text, understanding or expression in other aspects.

Reformulation occurs when the understanding and value of a significant belief, as revealed in the original experience/revelation/insight, is maintained but expressed in a new way. That is the form of expression in the aspects of religion is altered but the belief stays the same.

Reinterpretation occurs when a tradition re-evaluates its understanding of the meaning in an original experience/revelation/insight. For example, changing the interpretation from literal to metaphorical or indeed from metaphorical to literal.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	4	13	11	15	13	11	9	9	4	7	4.9

Most students correctly chose two aspects other than beliefs. However, many answers did not include identification 'of a particular religious belief' upon which to base the discussion. This was the major of two problems in numerous responses. The other problem was where a different belief was chosen for each aspect. Both of these problems indicated that students had misread questions.

- The beliefs aspect was not to be used as one of the expressions of the stated particular, religious belief.
- Responses had to identify clearly and correctly two aspects, the selected religious tradition and the particular belief.
- Responses had to give details for how each of those aspects contributes to maintaining continuity of the stated belief.
- Students should have given historical details related to a particular belief of a specific religious tradition.
- Responses that stayed with generic statements of the relationship between religious beliefs and other aspects in maintaining continuity of religious beliefs did not address the question. They gained some but not full marks, depending on accuracy of the generic statements.

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

Belief in the incarnation (God becoming human) has been maintained in the Catholic Christian tradition.

Sacred texts and other religious writings. From the first century of Christian times, the sacred texts allowed for continuity of belief in the Incarnation through expressing Jesus as God: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), "Being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). Additionally, the belief in the Incarnation was reformulated in the Nicene Creed in 325CE which responded to Arian denials of Jesus' divinity by declaring that the Son (Jesus) was "begotten not made". The reformulation was through the new use of a Greek/Hellenistic term 'homoousios' which described Jesus and God as being of the same essence.

Social structure. Throughout the history of the Catholic Christian tradition, dialectics and councils have provided for the survival and continuity of the belief in the Incarnation. For example, at the Council of Nicea (325CE) bishops acting "in persona Christi capitis" (Catechism of the Catholic Church #875) exercised their authority by reformulating the belief in the term homoousios and in 451CE Church leaders at the Council of Chalcedon added another reformulation in response to the Nestorian heresy with the phrase "Hypostatic Union". This addition maintained the belief that Jesus was the Incarnate God, of the same substance as God

and added that in Jesus was united two perfect and full natures (human and divine) in the one person.

Through the sacred texts, authoritative teaching, creeds and writings the belief in the Incarnation has been maintained throughout the history of the Catholic Christian tradition.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	7	7	14	16	18	16	22	3.7

Students who answered using the methods for maintaining continuity of religious beliefs did not recognise the focus of the question. This question asked for three different ways that religious traditions generally respond to current social or moral issues that in some way challenge their vision for society. The statement of the precise purpose of these ways of response – that is, of agreement, disagreement or posing alternatives – was not necessary but did add depth to competent responses. Also the context for the religious traditions and the contemporary issues was as stated in the study design, ‘modern multicultural, pluralist and democratic societies’ (page 29). Some responses indicated, through the ways they mentioned, that they were not using such a context. There needed to be concrete general examples, such as the issue of public statements in response to and participation in public debate on the issue. Partially correct answers may have used the terms ‘accept’, ‘reject’ or ‘ignore’ without further elaboration.

Possible responses included:

- Aware individuals or groups in the religious tradition make public statements in some form of media.
- An official position statement might be made by the leadership of the religious tradition. This might be made public and/or disseminated only within the religious community.
- Officially the tradition might remain silent, awaiting developments, though there might be considerable discussion within the religious community that may or may not become publicly known.
- Within a religious tradition there may develop action groups or events to promote support or objection to the issue. These may or may not be officially sanctioned by the religious tradition.
- Leaders or prominent thinkers within a religious tradition might join government policy-making committees that reflect different perspectives of the community.

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

They may respond by justifying and explaining their teachings through media releases and the publication of documents outlining their perspective. Such responses enable society to better understand the tradition’s viewpoint.

They may respond by engaging with society in open, mutually enriching dialogue which allows for discussion and an opportunity for resolution. This enables both the challenge and the religion to be explored and heard.

The tradition may ignore or reject the challenge completely by denying it attention. It may act as if the challenge is not occurring and therefore not engage with the problem at an official or whole tradition level.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	5	17	26	27	25	2.5

Most students were able to state what the ideal was for society according to the tradition they identified but the explanation, which required making the connections between the ideals and the beliefs that underpin them, was absent from many responses.

In this question, the context should have been, as stated in the study design, ‘modern multicultural, pluralist and democratic societies’ (page 29).

Responses should have indicated what the selected religious tradition wishes society to be like. They should also have made the connection between these ideals for society and the particular religious beliefs that underpin them and provide the reasons for the vision.

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

The Catholic Christian tradition (CCT) believes in a Trinitarian God – three co-equal persons in one God (Catechism of the Catholic Church #253) – that are so closely united by agapic love (total, self-sacrificing) (‘God is love’ 1 John 4:8) that the three persons are paradoxically one. Therefore, the CCT’s vision for society is a ‘civilisation of love’ (Pope John Paul 11) as “Trinitarian love is the ... revelation of the vocation of the human person to love” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church). The CCT’s vision involves following the command of the incarnate God, Jesus the second person of the Trinity, to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34), by upholding the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) which reverse many of the status quo attitudes and practices of society and by promoting the Catholic Social Teachings such as dignity of the human person and preferential option for the poor.

Question 2c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	17	22	19	14	13	9	6	2.3

Many answers did not deal with the ‘impact’, instead outlining the response of the religious tradition. The word ‘contemporary’ should not have been overlooked. Again, in this question the context should have been, as stated in the study design, ‘modern multicultural, pluralist and democratic societies’ (page 29). In some responses it was clear that this was not the context for what had been studied.

Most of the required response had to discuss the various influences of the response on the religious tradition itself. Some points that should have been considered in the discussion are:

- Did all the adherents know about the response?
- Was the response acknowledged by the adherents?
- Did they agree with the response?
- Was communication limited to certain sections of the tradition?
- Was it only the leaders of the tradition who responded?
- Did it have a dramatic effect on the attitudes or behaviour of adherents in general or in certain groups of the tradition?
- Overall, was the impact of the response on the religious tradition limited, negligible or dramatic?
- Did the response create internal friction, disharmony, alternative responses or support groups or efforts?

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

In the last decade the Australia the Catholic Christian tradition has responded to the challenge of secular fundamentalism (the idea that religion should stay out of politics, rejection and ridicule of religion) through documents and pamphlets. Among these was Cardinal George Pell's 'God and Caesar' 2007 collection of essays, 'On the Participation of Catholics in Political Life' (Vatican 2003) and NetAct (Federal Election Catholic Social Justice Kit 2004, 2007, 2016). The impact of these various documents has strengthened to some degree the tradition's public presence and enhanced the knowledge and understanding of the challenge of secular fundamentalism for some members of the tradition. The potential was for the information to educate adherents about the application of their religious beliefs to politics-to increase the relevance of the teachings, thereby potentially strengthening the ability of the beliefs to give meaning to life and show how the tradition's vision for society could be enacted. But the impact for the whole Australian Catholic community depended on the promotion of these documents in parishes and schools and the level of adherence to the tradition of its members. There is little evidence that the impact achieved a major change in the Australian Catholic community as many adherents continue to not understand the relevance of the Catholic social teachings in the political arena.

Question 2d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	20	24	25	18	13	1.8

Some student responses provided in Question 2d. were relevant for Question 2c. and vice versa. High-scoring answers conveyed a sense of the wider society being impacted upon.

In this question too, the context should have been, as stated in the study design, 'modern multicultural, pluralist and democratic societies' (page 29). In some responses the context was far too broad, making it very difficult for students to give any detailed precise information in their discussion. For example, the issue of poverty, and the engagement of a religious tradition in dealing with it, needed to be located in one modern multicultural, pluralist society in very recent times (such as Australia). Higher-scoring responses gave some identification of what they meant by 'wider society'. For instance, were they referring to everyone outside the religious tradition? Or did they acknowledge that there are different groups in the wider pluralist, democratic society – such as other religious, philosophical, humanitarian traditions or political affiliations – upon whom the impact of the responses of the tradition they have studied may be different?

Although the focus was the impact of the tradition's response on the wider society, there had to be some restatement of the response itself, or it may be that the impact overall is still working out and evidence is vague or uncertain at this point. If so, this needed to be acknowledged.

If no impact on the wider society was claimed, reasons had to be given and these should have considered the role played by the type of relationship existing between the religious tradition and the wider society.

Contemporary issues in pluralist societies are going to involve some form of impact on the wider society or parts of it, due largely to the presence of the media in all its variety.

Responses that predominantly described the response could not be awarded full marks.

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

Given the lack of change to the anti-religious, bigotry and the wide divide in the social structure of Australian society, the responses of the CCT to the challenge of secular fundamentalism had little effect on the wider non-religious Australian society as much of the Church's teachings are

ignored or seen as inaccessible to those outside the Church, indeed by many within the Church (“religions are based on revealed knowledge and therefore not accessible to truth” (factual) AC Grayling). However, by encouraging adherents to engage in politics, responses did have some influence on society as individual adherents contributed their voice and beliefs, especially connected to Catholic Social teachings (such as human dignity, preferential option for the poor and the common good) and to social and moral issues such as gay marriage, the refugee crisis. So adding more politically informed Catholic voices to the public forum has potentially enhanced discussion and understanding of the challenge of secularism.

Section C – Essay

Question chosen	none	1	2	3
%	2	17	40	41

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

Students were required to answer one question only.

Question 1

This question was the least popular choice. Students who attempted this question struggled to make the connections between the beliefs about ultimate reality and their understanding of self; between the beliefs about ultimate reality and their understanding of others; and between the beliefs about ultimate reality and the world. There was a tendency to describe rather than to discuss. Some responses addressed only two of the three elements.

- Students had to clearly articulate the actual beliefs of the religious tradition(s) on ultimate reality.
- Then the connections between beliefs about ultimate reality and the nature and purpose of human life needed to be made, possibly also with beliefs about death and the afterlife.
- The connections of the beliefs about ultimate reality to beliefs about the relationship between humans, and between humans and the world, needed to be made.
- In articulating the connections students had to state how those beliefs develop adherents' perceptions of self, others and the world.
- They also had to show understanding of how particular ways of expressing those beliefs contribute to the understanding of the beliefs.
- Each of these parts in the development of the response required use of appropriate examples from the religious tradition(s) used.
- Quotations from relevant sources were expected as support for the claims made.

There were a range of aspects used, according to the beliefs and the tradition(s).

Higher-scoring responses made explicit the connections between belief and its impact or influence.

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

Austrian Cardinal Schonborn once claimed that ‘wonder is the origin of philosophy’ and this is reflected in humanity’s constant existential questioning in regards to their understanding of their own identity, their relationship with others and their role in the natural world. All religious traditions attempt to answer these questions and provide meaning through belief in an ultimate

reality. In the Catholic Christian tradition, it is the belief in a loving God that is expressed through the eight aspects of religion that give adherents meaning in their lives.

Above all, the Catholicism believes that 'God is love' (1John 4:8). The central mystery of the Catholic faith is the Blessed Trinity (CCC264) which involves three persons (CCC 253) paradoxically seen as one God as a result of its agapic, total, unconditional unity of love. Adherents therefore declare not only to 'believe in one God' (Nicene Creed) but to believe in self-sacrificing love. The monotheistic yet triune God revealed Godself to humanity through Jesus; the definitive stage of revelation. Adherents believe that Jesus, God incarnate and second person of the Trinity is one with the Father (see John 10:30), existing with the Father in homoousios. The Incarnation in Jesus was to show humanity the way to salvation, declaring 'I am the way, the truth and life; no one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). Because Catholics view Jesus as God showing the way to eternal life with a loving creator, this belief dictates their understanding of themselves, others and the world.

Catholic Christians come to understand themselves as a result of being made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). It is said that the 'dignity of the human person is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God' (CCC 1700). Subsequently, believers see themselves as a manifestation of God's love, and this vision and understanding of themselves – the answer to the existential question "Who am I?" – is expressed through rituals, symbols, religious experience of personal and communal spirituality. The ritual of Baptism incorporates the symbol of water (representing life, forgiveness and purity) into a ceremony that acknowledges and upholds human dignity, emphasising being made in the image and likeness of an all forgiving and unconditionally loving God. This belief is also expressed through an individual's own actions in living to create a 'civilisation of love' (Pope John Paul 11).

This vision of a civilisation of love dictates an adherent Catholic's understanding of others by acknowledging that 'Trinitarian love is the revelation ... of the vocation of the human person to love' and that 'human beings are also divine beings' (Archbishop Oscar Romero). Catholic Christians seek 'to love one another as [Jesus] loved you' (John 13:34). This relationship with others – to treat others agapically – is expressed through ethical principles and the oral and written codes of behaviour, social structure (theoretically) and rituals. Ethical principles such as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) and the Catholic Social Teachings that are based on them, embody the idea that God is love, that all people are a reflection of God, and thus all are worthy of love. By endeavouring to uphold the Catholic social teachings, such as dignity of the human person, solidarity (as St Paul said, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male or female for you are all one in Jesus Christ". (Galatians 3:28), adherents spread God's Trinitarian love. This love is also communicated through participation in outreach organisations such as Caritas, St Vincent de Paul and NetAct. Ultimately a Catholic adherent's understanding of others – from the perspective of the Catholic Christian Tradition – finds its roots in God's love and humanity's divine image.

Belief in a loving God also influences Catholic's understanding of the world. By knowing God to be the Creator ('He alone is Creator', CCC 290; 'God created the heavens and the earth' Genesis 1:1) and experiencing God's love in their lives, adherents aim to treat the natural world with caring love.

They acknowledge that 'He has made everything beautiful in its time' (Ecclesiastes 3:11) through social structures and various types of stories. Social structures expressions of the Trinitarian love includes: environmental organisations such as Catholic Earth Care, Conservationist NetAct pamphlets encouraging faith communities to reduce emissions, and

papal encyclicals such as Pope Francis' Laudato Si, 2015, that states 'because all creatures are connected each must be cherished with love'. Various types of stories, including the Genesis creation myths urge humanity 'to till and to keep' (Genesis 2:15) the environment as '[humans] are the summit of the Creator's work' (CCC343). By acknowledging the interdependence of Creation and working to protect it, Catholics express their belief in a loving Creator.

The Catholic Christian tradition's belief in a God of total love informs all adherents' understanding of self, others and the world. With love at the centre of all teachings, the Catholic faith teaches that God's love is present in every human, in the environment and in the vision for society that stems from this belief. Therefore, humans should understand themselves and others to be instruments of God's love. As 'God has no hands but yours' (St Francis of Assisi), adherents are called to demonstrate Trinitarian love on God's behalf, expressing their belief in a loving God through various aspects such as rituals, symbols, ethical principles, and story. To practise Catholicism is to practice love and in the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero, 'let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world'.

Question 2

Some students did not acknowledge the requirement in this question to focus on one significant life experience, instead presenting many incidents in a biography. Beliefs needed to be clearly identified in order to be discussed. Identified means more than saying the person believed in a good God. Words such as 'changed' and 'strengthened' could not be left without explanation to show how, in detail, the person's belief was changed (for example, how it was weakened, strengthened, adjusted or developed).

There were two directions to be covered in responding to this question.

- Students needed to show how responding to and making sense of a significant life experience draws on the religious beliefs of a person or group.
- Students also had to show whether the engagement of the person's or group's religious beliefs in dealing with the significant life experience resulted in a strengthening effect on the beliefs though they remained unchanged; if it required a reinterpretation of the beliefs, which also could be a strengthening or a weakening of their importance; or if the beliefs had not been helpful for dealing with the significant life experience and led to the beliefs being neglected or even rejected.

Each of these parts in the development of the response required use of appropriate examples from the person(s) or group(s) and the religious tradition(s) used. Quotations from relevant sources were also expected as support for the claims made.

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

Significant life experiences punctuate every life, often acting as a turning point for religious beliefs. Some would argue that these experiences may transform the beliefs of even the most fervent religious adherents with the most concrete understanding of beliefs. For others the held beliefs may be strengthened, as evident for Jewish adherent, Esther Wachsmann, who chronicles in her essay 'His name was Nachshon Wachsmann', her encounter with the death of her son. Thus even life's cruellest vicissitudes can reaffirm religious beliefs for adherents, simultaneously as the adherent is guided through the experience by the beliefs and the related values they hold as religious truth for their life.

In October 1994, Esther Wachsmann's son Nachshon, was abducted, ransomed and murdered by Hamas terrorists. This experience catalysed emotions of shock, anguish, disbelief and sadness for Esther and her family in an ultimate test of their faith.

Prior to the murder of her son, Wachsman held steadfast beliefs in her God and in Judaism resulting, as a young adult, making Aliyah (migration) to Israel. Wachsman intended to raise 'proud, independent, believing children in their homeland after 2000 years' exile', as her beliefs in the importance of Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) to being Jewish permitted this. Wachsman stabilised belief in her tradition, buttressed by her three-fold love for [her] land, [her] people and [her] Torah (Jewish Bible). A commitment to which Wachsman owes her strengthened beliefs in response to her significant life experience of the death of her son.

Thus the murder of Nachshon proved to be extraordinarily troubling for Wachsman as the sudden death did not align with her religious beliefs of God being merciful, righteous and just in His actions. At the International Canadian Lubavitch Women's conference in 2000 Wachsman admitted to brief ambivalence in her beliefs, 'I could not understand ... the pain and suffering'. She extends to say that the experience 'didn't make sense to [her]'. Wachsman's beliefs about God and the nature and purpose of human life did not correspond with her traumatic experience. Hence she questioned and heavily reflected upon her beliefs.

Wachsman concluded that the experience was a test of faith. Ultimately, that the life experience was a trial from God to understand the extent to which she held veracity in the beliefs, values and ethical principles of Judaism. Therefore, Wachsman understood that to 'pass' the trial she must 'trust in God always', then reaffirming her choice to be devout in her beliefs by stating that there is no guarantee that at any one time, the priorities of humans and those of God will coincide.

In the Jewish tradition, when mourning for the deceased, the immediate family will enter a period known as the Shiva (seven days after death). This period saw that Wachsman and her family focussed solely on remembering and reflecting on the life of Nachshon, to ensure that he could later be celebrated and so his life would be given greater value. Jewish codes of behaviour ensure the process of this period by disregarding all luxuries, forms of vanity and extra activities like work, school and sport. Jewish codes similarly tenet that the extended family and friends of the bereaved must provide for and comfort them in their time of anguish. Wachsman recounts that 'the support from the community was overwhelming', not only from her immediate society but from around the globe. Despite the incredible support from these human outlets, Wachsman confirmed that God is the ultimate supporter as 'no mere mortal can comfort the bereaved like He can'. Wachsman elaborated on her reasoning claiming that 'God works in mysterious ways and we are in no position to question His righteousness, sense of justice or mercy'. Therein, Wachsman's beliefs about God and the validity of the values of Judaism were confirmed as a result of her significant experience.

With her reaffirmed beliefs, Wachsman intended to help others that faced similar situations of anguish, sorrow and disbelief as she had. Simultaneously Wachsman wanted to preserve the vision of Nachshon for ages to come. She states that he was 'named after a biblical character', who was documented as the bravest Israelite as he was the first to cross the Red Sea in the Exodus from Egypt. Thus Wachsman founded her support organisation, Beit Nachshon, to ensure this legacy of Nachshon was achieved.

In 2011, Gilad Shalit, an abducted Israeli soldier was freed and returned home. Wachsman's extreme advocacy for his release was emblematic of her responses to the death of her son. Her passion and love for the freed soldier encapsulated the fierce extent to which her beliefs were resultantly strengthened through her experience and how those reaffirmed beliefs about God and human relationship with God had shaped her into a new person. As a continuous, steadfast

believer in Judaism, Wachsman claims that she did what Jews have historically done – ‘picked up from the ashes and rebuilt’.

Question 3

Many responses to this question resulted in unbalanced essays. Too much was written on the responses to the significant historical challenge and too little was written on the effect of this response. The question required ‘a significant historical challenge’, and not more than one if staying within one religious tradition. Students who answered using two traditions referred to a challenge from both or may have used the same challenge and dealt with the various responses to it from both traditions; for example, the ‘Crusades’ worked well for both Catholic Christianity and Islam.

- Answers needed to refer to an historical challenge.
- The historical context of the challenge needed to be established briefly.
- The focus for developing the analysis in the answer to this question was the response of the tradition not the challenge itself.
- Students also had to look at the impact of the response on both the tradition itself and upon the relationship of the tradition to the wider society. This was a discussion, so various perceptions of the impact should have been included.
- Higher-scoring answers clearly established whether the challenge was internal or external, as this effected the response and the impact.
- There had to be evidence of critical thinking about the response, such as considering:
 - Was it appropriate?
 - Was it adequate?
 - Did it succeed at all?
 - Was it a short- or a long-term response?
 - Did it resolve or solve?
 - Did it have unexpected consequences? Positive or negative or both?

Each of these features in the development of the student answer required use of appropriate examples from the person(s) or group(s) in the religious tradition(s) used. Quotations from relevant sources would also be expected as support for the claims made.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response. The response had an overlong introduction (two-and-a-half pages) that set the context for the challenge, which – although thorough, accurate and analytical – was more than required; this introduction is not included below. It was fortunate this student had sufficient time to complete so competently the rest of the essay, dealing with the question focus.

One response, that Judaism used when faced with the significant historical challenge of the Holocaust was to rebuild its social structures. As membership was decimated the tradition had to adapt the “sharit ha platah” (surviving remnants task) to rebuild by affirming the belief common to members to “choose life” (Deut. 30). It was the survivors’ responsibility to emulate the enduring nature of those who were lost and who suffered. As Mark Baker wrote in his novel, “during the darkest moments of the holocaust, Jews affirmed life This response is the quintessential Jewish posture” (from Commemoration to Ritual). This response is where the impact on the tradition is most acutely felt as it involved rejuvenating the tradition through its aspects to ensure the existence of Judaism of Judaism prevailed. This response had little immediate impact on the relationship of Judaism with the wider society as the response to rebuild was so focused on the tradition itself. Also the wider society was self-focused on rebuilding after the experiences of World War 11. In the long term the revitalised Jewish tradition became active and recognised as a contributor to the wider society in many areas. Although this varies according to the branch of Judaism and how they perceive those outside

their form of Judaism. The response was effective in the sense that the Jewish tradition was able to somewhat move on and recreate social structures and sacred texts as well as reaffirm beliefs and rituals to convey to adherents the possibility to move on from the holocaust and not lose faith or abandon the tradition.

Another response taken by the tradition was to “Zachor” (Remember) in order to promote the notion of “Never Again”. The duty of remembrance is mentioned 169 times throughout the Torah, highlighting the imperative to remember those who perished and the impact on the challenge to survive. As Ellie Wiesel (holocaust survivor) wrote in his novel “Night”, “for the dead and the living we must bear witness”, further emphasising the necessity to remember. In order to officially concretise this notion, the Israeli Parliament established a commemoration day called “Yom Hashoah Ve Hagevurah” (day of remembrance and heroism) to acknowledge those who perished and those who survived. This response has been the most instrumental in enhancing the relationship with the wider society through education programs and commemorative museums. In Australia it has become an educational mandate to inform students about the Holocaust and the treachery that occurred. Globally many commemoration museums have been established to preserve the memory of those who were lost. At a United Nations designated commemoration day on January 26, the current American President Barack Obama, reiterated the notion that “we have a duty to remember”. Thereby portraying the significance of the holocaust not only to the Jewish people but to the wider society too; building and enhancing a more harmonious relationship based on comprehending or attempting to comprehend what the Jewish people endured and why.

It is difficult to quantify the effects that a response or a number of responses may have on a tradition or on its relationship with the wider society. In particular, the effects long term in contrast to short term are unknowable as it is almost impossible to predict how the challenge and its responses will be known in the future or if they will be remembered at all. As a Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth once wrote, “we have not reached the end of thinking about the Holocaust, in a sense we have hardly begun”.