



GCE AS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

RELIGIOUS STUDIES AS

SUMMER 2023

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Unit	Page
1a: An Introduction to Christianity	1-5
1b: An Introduction to Islam	6-11
1d. An Introduction to Buddhism	12-16
2. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion	17-22
3. An Introduction to Religion and Ethics.	23-28

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE AS

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 1A: AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY

General Comments

All questions were attempted, which provided some evidence about the accessibility of the paper. In Section A, Q2 (attempt% 57.9%) was the most popular question. In Section B, Q3 was the most popular question (attempt% 63.8%). There were some outstanding answers from candidates demonstrating both excellent knowledge and understanding in AO1 responses and evaluative skills in their AO2 responses. These candidates used their in-depth understanding of a range of concepts across the specification as a whole to tackle the questions set. Many went beyond the requirement of AS level and made relevant reference to scholars not listed in the specification. Weaker candidates demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding and/or included content not relevant to the question set.

Only limited commentary can be provided on each question due to the low number of entries for this Option.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) Outline the differences between the Eastern Orthodox Church and Western churches' celebrations of Advent and Christmas. [AO1 25]

Few candidates answered this question and the quality of the responses varied. Where students excelled, they included a wide range of information included in the mark scheme and made the differences clear. The responses were well-structured summaries. It was clear from these, that candidates understood the differences between the celebrations of the different traditions.

Weaker responses gave a vague description of Advent and Christmas in the Western tradition.

Features of stronger responses:

- made a clear distinction between Advent and Christmas.
- made a clear distinction between traditions.
- provided detailed knowledge of various aspects of the practices, services and beliefs which make up the celebrations.

Features of weaker responses:

- demonstrated limited/poor knowledge of the Eastern Orthodox tradition.
- gave vague responses about Christmas without focusing on different traditions.

- (b) 'Christmas is the most important festival for Christians.'**
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]

Part (b) of this question was generally answered more successfully than part (a), with most candidates debating the importance of both Christmas and Easter for Christians and coming to a clear conclusion. Many made the connection between Christmas and Easter clear, linking their importance and showing the need for the incarnation before the resurrection.

Features of stronger responses:

- made persuasive arguments supported by a range of points.
- used biblical references to support their arguments.

Features of weaker responses:

- focus on only one argument e.g. the commercialisation of Christmas.
- basic arguments not based on in-depth learning in Religious Studies (i.e. general arguments that those who have not studied RS could make).

- Q.2 (a) Examine the case for infant baptism with reference to Augustine and Zwingli. [AO1 25]**

This was by far the most popular question of Section A and the full range of marking bands were used. Candidates were usually able to examine the case for infant baptism well, supporting this view with biblical references. Augustine's views on infant baptism were addressed well by many, with the stronger responses including specific features of his views such as 'ingrafting'. The understanding of Zwingli varied, with some believing he argued against infant baptism and others giving a very brief account of his views. The strongest responses explained his views clearly, referencing his view of baptism being a sign and seal rather than a way of washing away sin. Some candidates did not include views of Augustine or Zwingli, and as such did not fully answer the question set.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated excellent knowledge of Augustine and Zwingli.
- provided a clear understanding of the biblical links to infant baptism.

Features of weaker responses:

- made no reference to Zwingli.
- incorrectly stated that Zwingli argued for adult baptism.

- (b) 'Baptism is for adult believers not infants.'**
Evaluate this view with reference to Christianity. [AO2 25]

Many candidates tackled this question well, with some presenting persuasive arguments for either infant or adult baptism. Some candidates argued vehemently that infant baptism is child abuse, citing Richard Dawkins' views. Many included Karl Barth's views for adult baptism, and most presented his views well, in order to support their own arguments.

Features of stronger responses:

- used a range of scholars to support their own arguments.
- made persuasive arguments, not just repeating AO1 information that was written in part (a).

Features of weaker responses:

- provided limited arguments that were not supported by reason and/or evidence.

Section B

- Q.3 (a) Explain ways in which the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke differ.**

[AO1 25]

The majority of candidates chose to answer this question and the full range of marks were awarded. In all cases, candidates had at least some accurate knowledge of the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke. Weaker responses confused the two accounts or included misconceptions. A few candidates conflated the two, for example believing both the magi and shepherds visited Mary, Joseph and Jesus in both accounts. Some candidates simply retold the birth narratives, describing what happened in each. In this instance, if the differences were made clear, this was creditworthy, but it limited candidates from achieving the higher bands, due to their lack of thorough engagement with the question set.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated excellent knowledge of each account, explaining key differences such as the mention of Herod.
- provided a clear explanation of why the differences may have come about, e.g. redaction criticism.
- biblical references made throughout.

Features of weaker responses:

- basic misconceptions e.g. 'King Harold'.
- conflating the two accounts (i.e., writing what happened in Luke was from Matthew and vice versa).

- (b) 'Redaction criticism is essential for understanding the birth narratives. Evaluate this view.**

[AO2 25]

Again, with this question, a full range of marks were awarded, with some excellent arguments either for or against the need for redaction criticism. Stronger responses included a clear understanding of redaction criticism and linked this to viewing the Bible as a history or a theology book, arguing their view on which it is. Some brought in Bultmann's demythologisation as another way of understanding the birth narratives. Weaker responses showed limited knowledge of redaction criticism and some candidates misunderstood it entirely.

Features of stronger responses:

- explored a range of ways of understanding the birth narratives, e.g. demythologisation.
- used sections of the birth narratives to prove or disprove the need for redaction criticism.

Features of weaker responses:

- total misunderstanding of what redaction criticism is.
- confused arguments based on a lack of understanding of the birth narratives.

Q.4 (a) Examine the New Testament community of believers as a model for churches today. [AO1 25]

Very few candidates selected this question, but those who did showed good knowledge and understanding of the biblical passage in Acts, and how this can be applied today. Many included accurate direct references, and used these well to show how and why churches today should base themselves on the New Testament community of believers.

Features of stronger responses:

- used direct biblical references used accurately and appropriately and expanded upon.
- had a clear focus on the question, applying to churches today.

Features of weaker responses:

- made no/little application of their limited knowledge and understanding to "... churches today."

(b) 'The main role of the Church is to provide religious teaching.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]

On the whole, this was answered well by those that selected this question. Candidates used a range of alternatives to contrast with other religious teachings in order to argue what the main role of the Church is. Alternatives included: providing sacraments, looking out for others, caring for the environment, engaging in charity work and evangelising. Mostly, these were supported by accurate biblical teaching.

Features of stronger responses:

- provided clear arguments supported by a range of arguments, not just comparison to one other main role.
- justified why religious teaching may be considered a main role of the Church.

Features of weaker responses:

- only provided a comparison to one other main role of the Church.

Q.5 (a) Outline the conflict between the wrath and love of God in theories of the Atonement.

[AO1 25]

Very few candidates selected to answer this question and the responses of those that did were varied. Stronger responses showed excellent knowledge and understanding of most or all of the theories of the Atonement within the specification and applied these clearly to the concepts of the wrath and love of God. Weaker responses showed knowledge of some of the theories of the Atonement but did not apply these to the love and/or wrath of God.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated an excellent understanding through clear explanation of the theories.
- provided a clear exploration of the conflict between the wrath and love of God.

Features of weaker responses:

- ignored part of the question about 'the conflict between wrath and love of God'.

**(b) 'Christians can accept all three theories of the Atonement.'
Evaluate this view.**

[AO2 25]

This question was generally answered well, with candidates arguing that Christians can accept all three theories of the Atonement as they all show how Christians can justify the necessity of Jesus' sacrifice. Stronger responses gave a critical analysis of the range of theories and supported them with biblical references.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated excellent knowledge of all 3 theories of Atonement in the specification.
- made use of biblical references or scholars' views, e.g. Origen's view that God paid a ransom to the Devil.

Features of weaker responses:

- lacked focus on the question and whether all three can be accepted.

Summary of key points

- Candidates need to revise all of the aspects of the specification in order to do them justice in AO1 responses, e.g. on this paper, Zwingli.
- Candidates should read the question carefully and ensure that their response addresses the specific demands of the question set.
- Some candidates need to learn to thoroughly evaluate a statement rather than just juxtaposing contrasting arguments.
- Candidates should aim to understand the timelines and wider context within which the content sits in order to address misconceptions.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE AS

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 1B: AN INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

General Comments

The standard of this summer's AS level responses was in line with that seen last year. The full range of bands across the range of responses provided. Candidates chose to answer the full range of questions on the paper. For Section A, Q1 on tawhid was the more popular (attempt% 70.4%). In Section B, Q5 on Akihrat (attempt% 53.8%) was the most popular question.

Candidates had reasonable subject knowledge and could refer to details relevant to all the questions they answered. Knowledge of tawhid was strong (Q1). Knowledge of the five categories (Q2) could be improved with more examples. The events of the Day of Final Judgement (Q3) could be revised by some candidates in more detail. Muhammad's preaching in Makkah could also be elaborated further by referring to its context (Q4). Ashura was well covered though might be improved by referring to a greater breadth of observances (Q5). In all questions, where candidates could offer supporting information, such as referring to a source of authority, scholars (although not a requirement at AS), etc. and this helped to distinguish these responses from others.

Candidates generally addressed statements for AO2, but not always directly: often they wrote around the topic and gave a general evaluation. The strongest candidates defined clearly what they would be writing about and referred back to any key words in the statement again and again, using them to focus and sustain their arguments and leading on to their conclusion. This is something centres might work on with their candidates.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 (a) Examine the benefits of zakah for Muslims. [AO1 25]

Benefits of zakah could include practical benefits such as giving food to the hungry and supporting the poor. Other benefits include equalising society and strengthening the bonds between different groups. There are also benefits in obeying the commands of Allah and gaining reward in the afterlife. The strongest responses considered this topic broadly and found a range of different benefits.

Features of stronger responses:

- covered several benefits, ranging from practical to spiritual, and provided some contextual information on zakah.
- gave specific examples of categories which might benefit.
- covered benefits for givers as well as receivers.

Features of weaker responses:

- only covered two or three people who might benefit, such as the poor.
- considered benefits in material terms alone.
- considered only receivers of payments.

(b) 'Support for the poor is central to Islam.'**Evaluate this view.****[AO2 25]**

Key to responding to this statement was to discuss what is central to Islam: core beliefs such as tawhid? Practices such as the Five Pillars? Or, generally following the Sunnah of Muhammad? Strongest discussions focused on this and what was central in the lives of Muslims, with most claiming that supporting the poor was central as it was part of the compulsory Pillar of zakah, but not as central as the statement of faith which is a condition of belief and recited daily during prayer.

Features of stronger responses:

- focused on the word 'central' in the statement and were well structured around whether zakah was or wasn't considered 'central' in Islam.
- made some comparison with other duties.
- supported the answer with evidence, such as references to quotes, scholars or teachings.

Features of weaker responses:

- did not recognise the importance of the word 'central' in the statement.
- wrote a few reasons why support for the poor was good in general.
- did not support their answers with reference to any specific evidence from Islam.

Q2 (a) Examine the categories of halal (blessed, allowed) and haram (forbidden) as guides for Muslim living.**[AO1 25]**

Halal and haram might be defined as two of five categories; or they might be defined as the two key differentiating categories which over-arch all five. Most candidates saw them as two of five but both approaches were credited. Examine means to 'consider in detail', so specific examples ranging from food laws to other actions were necessary to illustrate answers and show depth in the consideration of this question. It was important not just to describe, but also explain how these categories guided Muslims.

Features of stronger responses:

- defined the categories clearly in an introductory paragraph.
- gave multiple, specific examples of each category.
- focused on how these were guides and explained this clearly in answers.

Features of weaker responses:

- gave very few examples beyond food laws.
- described the categories, but did not explain their use as guides.
- confused general teachings in Islam with these categories, or even mistook the categories for the Five Pillars.

- (b) 'The five categories of action provide clear guidance for Muslims today.'**
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]

'Clear' guidance could be debated because the categories were mostly defined by Islamic scholars over a thousand years ago, so candidates generally saw that modern issues required looking at anew to provide solutions. Nevertheless, they might be addressed and given clear guidance within the framework of the five categories if modern scholarly interpretation is applied. How far this is valid is a matter of discussion and provided the core of some decent responses.

Features of stronger responses:

- discussed how clear the guides were in historical context, given their introduction centuries ago.
- debated different issues and how well the categories covered them, such as modern medical ethics.
- discussed modern Islamic scholarship and how far it could contribute to clarity in the guides.

Features of weaker responses:

- described the guides again, repeating part of part (a).
- covered very limited examples which were clear, such as food.
- did not focus on 'today' or how far the guides were 'clear', thereby missing the key words in the statement.

Section B

- Q.3 (a) Explain the significance of the events of Akhirah (the Day of Final Judgement) from the last trumpet onward.** [AO1 25]

This question required candidates to demonstrate what the events are and provide an understanding their significance. Some described the events without explaining them; others explained significance without describing many events. Candidates would be advised to revise the traditions thoroughly as they are a lot here that they could potentially refer to. The best candidates quoted source of wisdom and authority, such as Hadith traditions, to show evidence of knowledge of events on the Day. The significance relates not just to this time, but also to Muslims and their thoughts and actions in their lives today.

Features of stronger responses:

- referred to several events, including but not exclusively, judgement.
- explained the significance of these events, such as in the lives of Muslims.
- illustrated answers with references to Islamic traditions and subject specific vocabulary.

Features of weaker responses:

- only covered judgement, missing out the sequence of events on the Day, or events leading up to the Day but not the Day itself.
- missed out explaining the significance of these events.
- wrote in general without specific references.

- (b) **‘The Day of Final Judgement should inspire faith not fear.’**
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]

Faith might be inspired by the hope of everlasting life in the afterlife, with visions of a heavenly garden of paradise based on Hadith traditions. Fear might be engendered by thoughts of the fire of hell, with traditions of hot coals, wailing and punishment. Faith might be inspired with encouragement to practice their rituals more keenly with hope of reward; fear might also be a means to enforce practice for fear of Allah’s judgement. Which should be inspired is a matter of debate and the focus of the required discussion, which the best candidates realised.

Features of stronger responses:

- considered different ways in which the traditions might inspire faith and fear.
- discussed how different believers might respond differently to these.
- supported answers with evidence such as quotations to show the fearful and hopeful nature of judgement.

Features of weaker responses:

- gave simplistic answers about faith for heaven and fear of hell.
- ignored the part of the statement about faith and only considered fear.
- did not consider different Muslims reactions.

- Q.4 (a) **Outline Muhammad’s teachings in Makkah, following the Night of Power until his migration to Madinah.** [AO1 25]

The time period of this relates to Muhammad’s speech to his family in Makkah, when he first publicly preached Islam, up to the Hijrah, the journey to Madinah. It does not include any of the period when he lived in Madinah itself. The teachings were related to the message of Islam as revealed in the Qur’an, with many revelations in this period focusing on main beliefs, but should be put within the context of Muhammad’s preaching to the pagan Arabs, not an explanation of the Qur’an alone.

Features of stronger responses:

- were clear about the time period in the question.
- gave details about teachings in context, such as preaching against the idolatrous practices of the pagan Makkans.
- were able to talk about a variety of Muhammad’s teaching, including but not limited to, tawhid.

Features of weaker responses:

- covered the whole of Muhammad’s life, not just the Makkah part.
- wrote about the Qur’an, rather than Muhammad.
- did not set the teachings in context.

- (b) **‘Islam could have easily failed during the Makkan persecution.’**
Evaluate this view. [25]

With a small band of followers who were increasingly persecuted, their livelihoods and property threatened and under intense pressure to give up Islam, it could be argued that Islam might have failed.

On the other hand, would Allah have allowed this to happen if it was all part of Allah's pre-ordained plan? The 'could have' in the question invited hypotheticals and exploring of possibilities, which a few candidates were able to follow up in a sustained way.

Features of stronger responses:

- understood and responded to the conjecture in the statement.
- developed this with reasoning which included if statements and possibilities.
- considered a range of different factors.

Features of weaker responses:

- assumed that it could not have failed because of Muhammad, without detailing why.
- described the Makkan persecution, without debating its possible effects.
- did not engage with the word 'failed' in the statement.

Q.5 (a) Examine the observance of Ashura by Shi'a Muslims. [AO1 25]

Ashura might be observed in many ways, including actual or symbolic flagellation or chest beating; shouting; recitation of devotions; processions; plays to re-enact events at Karbala; religious speeches explaining events; gatherings at mosques; visits which might be regarded as forms of pilgrimages to shrines of the martyrs of Karbala, and so on. The strongest responses contained several of these and explained the significance behind them.

Features of stronger responses:

- covered a range of observances including re-enactment plays, educational speeches and pilgrimages to relevant sites.
- explained the meaning behind these practices.
- gave detailed examples.

Features of weaker responses:

- wrote only about self-flagellation.
- sometimes confused Ashura with other occasions marked by Muslims.
- wrote about why observances were made, without describing them.

(b) 'It is excessive to use self-harm in religious devotions.' Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]

This question proved a differentiator between candidates who could see the implications of the word excessive and those who looked at the topic in simplistic terms. Excellent answers explained that self-harm might be considered differently: some Shi'a Muslims might not consider it self-harm at all if done under the spirit of mourning; others might use variation of the practice which did not actually cause harm but was symbolic. Most argued that Allah would not want harm and quoted some Hadith traditions to justify these, to balance their discussions.

Features of stronger responses:

- focused on the word 'excessive'.
- confined the answer to religious devotions rather than self-harm in general.
- considered a range of ways in which Shi'a Muslims might mark Ashura, ranging from symbolic to actual self-harm.

Features of weaker responses:

- wrote about whether self-harm was right or wrong, not was it 'excessive'.
- did not focus the answer on devotions.
- saw the issue simplistically as a Shi'a / Sunni division.

Summary of key points

- Making definitions of words or topics in a short introductory paragraph really helped to guide examiners to where an answer was heading, providing clarity for the essay overall.
- Candidates would benefit from learning about the variety of ways in which Ashura is observed; the context of Muhammad's teachings to the Makkans; more examples of the Five Categories of action and events of the Day of final Judgment.
- Candidates might learn more quotations, references, etc., which they may refer to in order to support answers at the higher end, especially those aiming for Band 5.
- Candidates should ensure they respond to the key words in the statement in AO2 questions. Focusing on these in their arguments will help develop relevant, sustained evaluations.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE AS

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 1D: AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

General Comments

In Section A, Q2 (attempt% 68.3%) was the most popular question. In Section B, Q3 was the most popular question (attempt% 47.5%). The question paper allowed students to demonstrate both depth and breadth across the AO1 and AO2 elements of each question. A full range of bands were visible across the answers found in Qs 1-4. The limited number of answers for Q5 meant that this was not the case in this question. There were some examples of excellent answers across the cohort that achieved full marks. There were also examples of candidate responses that showed exceptional analysis and evaluation as well as scholarly input.

The AO1 responses that gained the best marks were those which engaged with all elements of the question fully. The responses that achieved band five for the AO2, were those that had a wide variety of arguments in response to the statement, clearly demonstrating the full scope of the question. The responses that fell into the lower bands were those which offered limited arguments.

Only limited commentary can be provided on each question due to the low number of entries for this Option.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) Examine how the Theravada monastic sangha use the Patimokkha. [AO1 25]

Most candidates explained what the Patimokkha is well, and could give a variety of examples. The focus for most candidates was the use of the parajikas by the sangha. These were explained individually by many candidates.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated an understanding of the various elements of the Patimokkha beyond the parajikas.
- focussed on the variety of ways that Buddhists use the Patimokkha.

Features of weaker responses:

- not focussing on the use of the Patimokkha but rather just giving a description of the Patimokkha only.

(b) 'Buddhists do not need the Patimokkha.' [AO2 25]

This question generated answers that focussed mainly on Theravada Buddhism, following from part (a). The best candidate responses were those which made a comparison to other Buddhist traditions, identifying that not all Buddhists would feel the 'need' for the Patimokkha.

Some candidates fell into the trap of reusing the content of part (a) without adjusting the content for an AO2 response.

Features of stronger responses:

- provided an understanding that other groups of Buddhists may not hold the Patimokkha to be important.
- explained in various ways why each section of the Patimokkha might be necessary or unnecessary.

Features of weaker responses:

- tended to focus just on the Theravada Buddhist sangha.

Q.2 (a) Explain how Buddhists might interpret narratives about the Buddha's birth and early life. [AO1 25]

The best candidate answers engaged with the concept of interpretation. Candidates who identified that different Buddhists may view the narratives through a variety of lenses were those who also had marks awarded in the higher bands. There were many candidates who failed to go much further than describing the birth and the early upbringing of the Buddha. Many candidate answers described the Buddha's birth, early life and all the way up to his life as an ascetic. These answers that included the early life of the Buddha as a man rather than just his childhood were still credited.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated an understanding of the lenses that might be applied to the birth narratives and early life narratives, such as hagiographical and biographical.
- provided an understanding of the symbolism of each of the events.

Features of weaker responses:

- focussed simply on a description of the birth story and conception without any explanation of symbolism and meaning to Buddhists.
- purely focussed on the story from before his birth and the days that followed his birth, missing out on 'early life'.

(b) 'The biography of the Buddha can only be understood as hagiographical.' [AO2 25]

This question was generally answered very well by candidates, and as the most popular question to be answered in Section A. There was a variety of answers that fell into each band. There were very few candidates who failed to engage with the word 'hagiography'. There were many top band answers of candidates who demonstrated an understanding of scholarly thought and used a variety of examples.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated a wide variety of arguments that explore hagiographical, biographical and mythological interpretations of the Buddha's life story.
- explored scriptural, theological and/or scholarly interpretations.

Features of weaker responses:

- focussed on the hagiography and one other lens.
- provided a limited number of arguments.

Q.3 (a) Examine the practices of dana (giving) and punya (merit) in Buddhism. [AO1 25]

This question was the most popular of Section B. There were a variety of examples of answers in most bands. The best answers were those that covered the two elements of the question in detail and with equal attention. Candidates who managed to offer examples of different ways that dana could be demonstrated and punya received were those that were awarded the higher bands.

Features of stronger responses:

- gave equal weighting to each of the words, dana and punya.
- demonstrated many ways in which dana can be performed, as well as the variety of recipients that can receive punya, and how.
- could express the specific nature of the selflessness that surrounds dana.

Features of weaker responses:

- failed to explain one of the two elements featured in the question.
- did not demonstrate that there was variety in punya and dana.

(b) 'Dana is the most important teaching in Buddhism.' [AO2 25]

Candidates responded to this question well and there were examples to be found in each band. Candidates that answered (a) well, tended to answer part (b) well and often better. The best answers engaged with the dana and the way that this concept links to other Buddhist concepts such as karma, punya and the path of the Bodhisattva.

Features of stronger responses:

- included an excellent analysis and evaluation of dana and its importance as well as the offering of a variety of other Buddhist teachings and their varying importance.
- featured arguments that offered direct comparisons to dana within the evaluations.

Features of weaker responses:

- provided limited arguments about other important teachings but failed to offer any analysis or evaluation.

Q4. (a) Explain the application of the dasa sila (ten precepts) within the sangha. [AO1 25]

This was the second most popular question in Section B. Candidates tended to offer a selection or all of the ten precepts, and the best responses gave examples that demonstrated that they understood the rules in the context of the monks and nuns.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrating the 'application' of the rules, rather than just stating them.
- answers that showed an understanding of the consequences that occur from following or going against the dasa sila.

Features of weaker responses:

- listing the rules and explaining that they are followed by the sangha, only.

(b) 'The dasa sila is the only way to regulate the sangha.' [AO2 25]

Candidates tended to respond to this question in a similar way, explaining that there was no one way to regulate a sangha. Some candidates went into a discussion about there no longer being a need to regulate the sangha. Most candidates managed to engage well with the statement showing a good understanding of the issues and used a variety of arguments in their response.

Features of stronger responses:

- used a variety of arguments for and against the statement that are fully explained with specific examples found in scripture as well as general Buddhist teachings.
- engagement with the idea of an evolving set of needs within a sangha from the time of the Buddha.

Features of weaker responses:

- focussed simply on the 'worth' of the rules.

Q.5 (a) Examine the Buddhist concept of karma, with reference to Chapter 1 (The Pairs) and Chapter 9 (Evil) of the Dhammapada. [AO1 25]

Very few candidates answered this question, and therefore it is not possible to provide general comments on this item.

Features of stronger responses:

- provided detailed knowledge and understanding of the teaching found in the Dhammapada.
- the candidate offered an extensive description of the concept of karma.

Features of weaker responses:

- the candidate offered a very limited answer that gave a basic understand of karma and no reference to either piece of scripture mentioned in the question.

(b) 'The three lakshanas are the most important concepts in Buddhism.' [AO2 25]

Three candidates answered this question. The lack of candidate answers means that generalised comments are not of use.

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated a clear understanding of the three lakshanas and of the importance of each one, including examples.
- provided well supported arguments that demonstrated a clear understanding of other important concepts in Buddhism.

Features of weaker responses:

- failed to include important terminology such as anicca, anatta and dukkha in their response.

Summary of key points

- Candidates who generally performed well were those who remained focussed on the question set, without deviating to ideas around the central concept. This applies to both the AO1 and AO2.
- Candidates need to ensure that they read the questions carefully and ensure that their responses cover all parts of the question and that they are answering the question directly.
- When responding to AO2 questions, candidates need to support their lines of reasoning with examples and/or evidence. Candidates also need to ensure that they thoroughly develop each line of enquiry.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE AS

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 2: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

General Comments

In Section A, Q2 (attempt% 58.5%) was the most popular question. In Section B, Q4 was the most popular question (attempt% 46.4%). The responses demonstrated clear differentiation and marks were awarded across the full spectrum, with some demonstrating excellent knowledge and understanding. Part (b) AO2 questions demonstrated a good level of evaluation overall. In weaker responses there was the conflation or confusion of different scholars and theories, for example Aquinas' 3rd way from necessary existence and Anselm's second form of the Ontological argument. However, this provided a key differentiator for assessment.

There were no rubric errors and it was good to see that the vast majority of candidates finished all questions they attempted. Handwriting on the whole was legible and there was a good number of typed scripts indicating that centres are picking up on handwriting and illegibility issues prior to the examinations.

On the whole it is clear candidates are making considerable use of the wide range of resources available and there is evidence of some excellent teaching which is enhancing understanding and responses.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a) Outline the different teleological arguments for the existence of God presented by:**
i) Paley's analogy of complex design
and
ii) Tennant's aesthetic argument. [AO1 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated a clear understanding of how Paley's argument moves from the complexity, order and purpose of the watch which he understood to be similar to features in the natural world, to argue that as a watch has a watchmaker, we can conclude the universe has a universe maker which is God.
- showed understanding of the question by use of well-chosen analogies and examples, such as the human eye and other natural features for Paley, and sunsets, music and artwork for Tennant.
- contextualised Paley and Tennant's arguments within their historical background. For example, how Tennant's aesthetic argument followed on from and responded to the theory of evolution.

Features of weaker responses:

- neglected to refer to Tennant's aesthetic argument or focussed on Tennant's anthropic argument which did not feature in the question.

- were often brief in their outline of Paley, such as not using examples of apparent complexity, order or purpose in the natural world to demonstrate their understanding.
- included explanations of Aquinas' 5th way which did not feature in the question.
- neglected to make the link from Paley's example of complexity, order and purpose in the watch to God's existence.

(b) 'Teleological arguments are more persuasive than scientific explanations for the existence of the universe.'
Evaluate this view.

[AO2 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- engaged with the 'scientific explanation' aspect of the question. For example, weighing up the persuasiveness of teleological arguments against the theory of evolution.
- referred to the persuasiveness of modern developments of teleological arguments such as the anthropic and aesthetic principles in light of the challenge from scientific explanations.
- linked wider revised material to the scientific aspect of the question. For example, the epicurean hypothesis to the big bang theory, and the problem of evil to natural selection.
- reference was made to the word 'persuasive' which is not the same as 'proves'.

Features of weaker responses:

- did not engage with the 'scientific explanation' aspect of the question, instead providing more general strengths and weaknesses of teleological arguments, or where they did refer to science, simply listed facts about the Big Bang and evolution.
- listed or described strengths and weaknesses of teleological arguments rather than demonstrating analysis and evaluation.
- did not engage with the 'persuasive' aspect of the question.
- struggled to clearly identify different lines of argument beyond a 'science' and 'religion' divide.
- confused scientific challenges to teleological arguments with those more suited to challenging cosmological arguments. For example, the Big Bang theory as the cause of the universe.

Q.2 (a) Outline the different cosmological arguments presented by:
i) Aquinas' First Three Ways
and
ii) the Kalam argument.

[AO1 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- were able to successfully outline Aquinas' First Three Ways with detail. For example, tackling Aquinas' arguments from motion, cause and contingency separately, referred to potentiality and actuality, and included Aquinas' rejection of infinite regress.
- successfully outlined the Kalam argument with reference to William Lane Craig's arguments including his rejection of an actual infinite and why the cause of this universe must be a personal cause.

- made use of examples such as wood becoming hot, a marble statue and dominoes for Aquinas, and a library with an infinite number of red and black books for the Kalam argument.

Features of weaker responses:

- failed to distinguish between Aquinas' First Three Ways.
- repeatedly stated that the cosmological argument was based on cause and effect and rejected infinite regress without demonstrating an understanding of how or why this was the case.
- either neglected to refer to the Kalam Argument or when they did, were unable to differentiate it from the Aquinas' three ways, and often only referring to one isolated aspect of the Kalam argument such as the universe having a beginning so requiring a cause.

**(b) 'Cosmological arguments are effective in proving God's existence.'
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]**

Features of stronger responses:

- demonstrated how modern theories concerning the origin of the world could be used both to challenge the effectiveness of cosmological arguments in proving God's existence but also support it. For example, the Big Bang theory as a non-religious cause for the universe, or as proof that the universe had a beginning and therefore required a necessary cause.
- evaluated how effective the *a posteriori* evidence was for Aquinas' cosmological argument, with reference to modern discoveries such as Newton's laws of motion and inertia.
- included philosophical objections such as logical fallacies in cosmological arguments in their analysis and evaluation.
- considered whether the Kalam argument was more effective than Aquinas' First Three Ways.

Features of weaker responses:

- often repeated AO1 information about Aquinas' First Three Ways and the Kalam argument from Q2.(a) without developing any analysis or evaluation.
- limited reference to specific scientific challenges or philosophical objections or scholarly views.
- did not provide a justified view or evaluation of the issue.

Q.3 (a) Outline the nature of religious experience with reference to prayer and conversion. [AO1 25]

This question was the least to be attempted and there was a greater disparity between stronger and weaker responses.

Features of stronger responses:

- successfully detailed the concepts of prayer and conversion as forms of religious experience.
- referred to ideas on the different stages and types of prayer, such as St Teresa of Avila's seven mansions, gardening analogy, or interior castle, which were linked back to prayer.

- discussed different types of conversions such as sudden and gradual, with reference to examples to illustrate. Saul's conversion to St Paul was frequently used as an example of the life changing nature of conversion, among others.

Features of weaker responses:

- the reference to prayer was brief and different stages and types were not explored.
- Included discussions about conversion which were often more detailed than the section on prayer, did not refer to different forms of conversion such as sudden or gradual.
- focused more on describing religious experience generally rather than tailoring revised material to the question focus on prayer and conversion.

(b) 'Challenges to religious experiences prove they do not really happen.'
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- had a good grasp of the challenges to religious experiences and successfully applied these to the question.
- Made references to a variety of challenges from different perspectives and scholars, such as Caroline Franks-Davis, Freud and Persinger.
- used scholarly perspectives on the nature of religious experiences such as William James and Rudolph Otto to counter argue against challenges to religious experience.

Features of weaker responses:

- tended to give examples of religious experiences without answering the question.
- listed or described possible challenges to religious experiences without developing points to whether religious experiences actually happen or not. For example, stating that religious experiences could be a result of a hallucination without then giving a view about whether this was proof that religious experiences did not really happen or that a hallucination could be a means for a religious experience to occur.

Q.4 (a) Explain how Irenaean type theodicies offer a solution to the problem of evil. [AO1 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- contained accurate and detailed presentation of key Irenaean elements such as
- 'image', 'likeness', 'soul-making', 'epistemic distance', etc.
- included good awareness of how John Hick developed the theodicy, especially with regards to 'second order goods' and 'eschatological justification'.
- demonstrated clear understanding of the purpose of 'epistemic distance' linking it to
- both free will and spiritual development.
- explained all the above with a focus on how these ideas attempt to solve the
- problem of evil.

Features of weaker responses:

- some candidates referred to Augustinian type theodicies in error
- spent too much time outlining the problem of evil.
- had the general idea of evil serving a purpose of 'teaching' and 'development', but could not clearly explain how through use of appropriate examples.
- omitted key elements such as 'image' and 'likeness' distinction, epistemic distance, eschatological justification etc.
- Merely presented the free will defence.

(b) 'Augustinian type theodicies successfully defend the God of Classical Theism.'

Evaluate this view.

[AO2 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- did not simply describe material, but used details to support a view in order to make an evaluative point
- were able to cite successes of these types of theodicies in defence of specific attributes of the God of Classical Theism, as well as their possible failures. For example, proceeding with creation despite foreknowledge of the immense extent of unnecessary and pointless suffering presents a challenge to any defence of God as omnibenevolent.
- included the theodicy's basis in Scripture, as well as it being acceptable within Christianity and other Abrahamic religions due to its reliance on creation and The Fall as described in Genesis.
- differentiated between the defence of the God of Classical Theism against the logical problem of evil and the evidential problem of evil.

Features of weaker responses:

- included unnecessary explanations of Augustinian type theodicies in terms of AO1 information. This wasted time and resulted in a lack of analysis and evaluation.
- confined answers solely to failures of Augustinian type theodicies and were unable to truly evaluate in response to the specific question and focus on defence of the God of classical theism.
- confused Augustinian type theodicies with Irenaean type theodicies.

Q.5 (a) Outline the ontological arguments for the existence of God presented by Anselm and Malcolm. [AO1 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- selected material relevant to the question and demonstrated an understanding of the arguments deductive and a priori nature.
- gave an account of St Anselm's ontological arguments with reference to the context of 'faith seeking understanding', or examples such as Anselm's painter analogy.
- included Malcolm's development of St Anselm's ontological argument in response to Kant's critique, that whilst existence was not a predicate, necessary existence was.
- included reference to Malcolm's modal argument and how God's existence must be necessary or impossible, and therefore as an unlimited being whose existence is not impossible, God must have necessary existence.

Features of weaker responses:

- neglected to refer to Malcolm's ontological argument or if they did, tended to either gloss over the modal aspect of his argument.
- included content not relevant to the question such as detailed accounts of Descartes' ontological argument or the full account of Gaunilo and Kant's critique of ontological arguments.
- confused St Anselm's second form of the ontological argument for God's necessary existence with Aquinas' Third Way from contingency.

Q.5 (b) 'Challenges to the ontological argument result in its failure.'
Evaluate this view.

[AO2 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- were able to refer to a range of relevant scholars in support of clear views leading to an effective or perceptive evaluation.
- selected material relevant to the specific question and their reasoning
- did not describe challenges to ontological arguments but referred to them in order to provide reasoning or evidence for why the selected challenges resulted in the failure of the argument or not.

Features of weaker responses:

- included unnecessary AO1 style description of challenges to ontological arguments, and in some cases going on to provide further description of responses, without making any analysis or evaluative points.
- misunderstood the deductive and *a priori* nature of ontological arguments which in turn led to inaccurate challenges regarding inductive and *a posteriori* arguments.
- confused scholars' views and referred to challenges to cosmological arguments instead.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should be reminded that the material studied and revised needs to be adapted to the questions set.
- Candidates should ensure they fully understand the demands of both part (a) AO1 and part (b) AO2 questions.
- Candidates need to avoid giving descriptive responses in AO2 questions and should use evaluative vocabulary.
- Examples, reference to scholars listed in the specification and quotes should be made to illustrate ideas or to underpin and support points being made.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

GCE AS

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 3: AN INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION AND ETHICS

General Comments

In Section A, Q1 (attempt% 51.7%) was the most popular question. In Section B, Q3 was the most popular question (attempt% 36.6%). Candidate performance in this paper was consistent with that in previous years. Candidates showed a good understanding of the rubric of the paper, with most having attempted both parts of one question from each section.

In general, on this paper, most candidates showed a clear knowledge and understanding of the subject area in the questions that they chose to answer. They knew and understood the specialist subject vocabulary and showed evidence of reading from the wide range of resources that are now available for this paper.

Many candidates demonstrated a well-developed ability to structure their answers in a coherent manner which enabled them to sustain evaluation throughout their AO2 responses. A few candidates still produced very repetitive responses that were more focused on structure than content.

There are still some issues regarding the legibility of some candidates writing under examination conditions. Centres are reminded of the need to identify appropriate provision for such candidates, e.g. the use of a laptop, so all their response can be fairly assessed.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) Explain Virtue Theory.

[AO1 25]

This was a very clear and accessible question. It was the most popular of the compulsory Section A.

Features of stronger responses:

- were able to explore what eudaimonia means (flourishing life) and consider this as something that was achieved over the course of a full lifetime.
- explained the different types of happiness that were possible in a flourishing life as a way of demonstrating the place of Virtue Theory in the development of society.
- were able to give an overview of the different aspects of Virtue Theory as a character-based ethic that is achieved through habit and practice.
- were able to demonstrate how Virtue Theory might be understood by more than just Aristotle.

Features of weaker responses:

- conflated the ideas of Aristotle, Jesus and Aquinas.
- believed Jesus influenced Aristotle.
- failed to accurately apply accurate vocabulary to Aristotle's Virtue Theory, by calling it deontological or consequentialist.
- lost focus and moved into evaluation part way through their answer.

- (b) **'Virtue Theory is of no use when trying to solve a moral dilemma.'**
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- were aware of the kind of challenges that might be offered against Virtue Theory.
- were able to consider what kinds of things a 'useful' moral theory would be equipped to do – e.g. to advise about correct actions
- considered the importance of role models in Virtue Theory and the usefulness of such guides.

Features of weaker responses:

- attempted to show how Virtue Theory might work by giving worked examples like abortion. This was difficult to execute well because of the nature of the ethical theory, but this was rarely noticed by the candidate and used to their advantage.
- viewed Virtue Theory to be solely about good intentions behind moral deeds. This misunderstanding affected their ability to raise successful lines of argument regarding the usefulness of Virtue Theory.
- used the question to evaluate a range of other ethical theories and thus lost sight of the 'usefulness' of Virtue Theory.

- Q.2 (a) Examine the importance of self-interest in Ethical Egoism.** [AO1 25]

This was the least popular question in Section A.

Features of stronger responses:

- Many candidates wrote clear and coherent responses to this question and provided a clear understanding of Stirner.
- made good use of vocabulary and explanations of *eigenheit* and *einzig*.
- were able to contrast egoism with altruism and Ethical Egoism with Psychological Egoism.
- Gave some exploration of the importance of balancing long and short-term interest as well as the benefits of a Union of Egoists.

Features of weaker responses:

- did not understand this question as an exploration of how self-interest fits into Ethical Egoism. As a result, there were some vague AO2 style responses that did not contain much detail about Ethical Egoism.
- over simplified self-interest by describing it as happiness or pleasure.
- saw Ethical Egoism as deliberately destructive of other people, rather than simply prioritising self-interest.

- (b) **‘Ethical Egoism is superior to all other ethical theories.’
Evaluate this view.**

[A02 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- attempted to contrast Ethical Egoism with other ethical theories and examples were used. The best responses brought these points back around to the superiority of egoism.
- Showed some good knowledge of the criticisms of Ethical Egoism from the specification.
- were able to consider what made a theory ‘superior’ such as providing guiding principles, protecting society or empowering the moral agent and were able to weigh up the extent to which Egoism achieved any of these things.

Features of weaker responses

- struggled to evaluate Ethical Egoism and instead moved into an evaluation of other ethical theories such as Divine Command or Virtue Ethics.
- tended provide a range of examples of how Ethical Egoism would be selfish without recognition of the arguments that claim it is not.
- gave AO1 style responses that outlined different ethical theories that might be considered ‘superior’, but without significant evaluative comment.

- Q.3 (a) Outline Aquinas’ Natural Law Theory.**

[AO1 25]

This was a popular question, many candidates who attempted this question were confident in their knowledge of Natural Law Theory and had plenty to write. There was a strong sense that they knew how to respond to the question.

Features of stronger responses:

- were able to work through not only the primary and secondary precepts but also interior / exterior acts, real / apparent goods and the virtues.
- were able to provide good examples of secondary precepts and even to briefly apply Natural Law to ethical dilemmas.
- understood the Aristotelian roots of Natural Law.

Features of weaker responses:

- spent a disproportionately long time upon detailing the four levels of law at the expense of detail of Natural Law Theory itself.
- misunderstood the goal of Natural Law for Aquinas and some conflated his ideas those of Aristotle.
- struggled to define interior and exterior acts correctly, mistakenly seeing exterior acts as bad actions.

- (b) **‘The strengths of Natural Law clearly outweigh its weaknesses.’
Evaluate this view.**

[A02 25]

Features of stronger responses:

- answered the question with clarity and were able to weigh up strengths and weaknesses effectively.

- were able to utilise scholars like Fletcher to assist their evaluation of rigid deontological approaches.
- demonstrated a good working knowledge of how Natural Law might be applied in real situations to demonstrate its strengths and weaknesses. For example, some made use of double effect or the holistic nature of the theory by considering both action and character.

Features of weaker responses:

- became confused over the nature of double effect and thus presented erroneous arguments.
- moved into an AO1 style where they described strengths and weaknesses rather than evaluating them.
- tended towards a list of strengths over a paragraph, followed by a list of weaknesses without significant evaluative comment.

Q.4 (a) Explain John Stuart Mills' development of Utilitarianism. [AO1 25]

Whilst this was a less popular question, it did attract many confident responses.

Features of stronger responses:

- candidates were able to explain what the utility principle was with accuracy by using Bentham's statement of it and referring to both pleasure and pain.
- candidates were able to use Bentham to demonstrate how Mill developed the theory to eradicate some of the problems with it.
- the best responses focused primarily on quality of pleasure, higher and lower pleasures, Rule Utilitarianism and the harm principle.

Features of weaker responses:

- spent a long-time describing Bentham's Utilitarianism, this did not allow them time to explore Mill fully and sometimes there was no link to Mill at all.
- listed all the features of Bentham's hedonic calculus and showing how it would be applied.
- gave lengthy explanations of Foot's Trolley Problem without reference to Mill. Some candidates believed that Bentham introduced the Trolley Problem.

**(b) 'Utilitarianism does not work in contemporary society.'
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]**

Features of stronger responses:

- provided good examples and explored how Utilitarianism could work to solve modern problems like animal testing, nuclear weapons and more.
- considered that the answer might depend upon whether we are talking about Act or Rule Utilitarianism.
- explored how contemporary society is different from the society that Bentham or Mill lived in and consider whether Utilitarianism can be used to solve those problems that are relevant today.

Features of weaker responses:

- did not differentiate between Act and Rule or produced more generalised responses about Utilitarianism.
- there was no recognition of Bentham or Mill's role in law making and the justice system that still has an impact on the legal system today.
- regularly claimed that Utilitarianism and its goal of happiness was outdated without convincing reasoning.

Q.5 (a) Outline Joesph Fletcher's Situation Ethics. [AO1 25]

This was a very popular question for candidates.

Features of stronger responses:

- understood that this is a consequentialist theory and that moral judgements depend on each situation.
- developed the four working principles and six fundamental principles and defined key terms accurately.
- provided worked examples, and some could give examples that Fletcher himself used.
- used scripture to support Fletcher's choice of agape.

Features of weaker responses:

- were unable to list any of the principles and talked about the issue of love.
- got bogged down in defining different kinds of love at the expense of summarising Fletcher's theory.
- spent a significant amount of time detailing the context in which Fletcher was writing, whilst this was not irrelevant, caution should be exercised in an 'outline' answer that this is not at the expense of summarising the theory.

**(b) 'Situation Ethics clearly promotes justice.'
Evaluate this view. [AO2 25]****Features of stronger responses:**

- included some kind of consideration about what justice might be – e.g., fairness, or application of a system of law etc.
- were able to note the principle that 'justice is love distributed' according to Fletcher
- considered whether Situation Ethics was a Christianised version of Utilitarianism and therefore tried to promote maximum love for the majority.
- were able to use worked examples to show that it was not practical to use only love to try and produce justice – using Fletcher's example of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or using examples of their own to show how subjective or impossible it is to apply love.

Features of weaker responses:

- did not know what justice means and so spent some time just detailing the strengths and weaknesses of the theory.
- were unsure what love or agape referred to – seeing it as emotional feeling rather than an act of charity or kindness to others.
- did not provide any kinds of examples to support their claims.
- made claims about the selfishness of Situation Ethics that were unsupported.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should make sure that they read both parts of a question before answering each part. There is no point in choosing a question where you can only answer 1 of the 2 parts with confidence.
- In their AO1 responses candidates should aim to minimise or avoid lengthy context setting that will limit their ability to get on with the response to the actual question.
- In AO2 responses, it can be beneficial for candidates to consider at the outset the meaning of the focus words – e.g., justice, contemporary society, useful or superior and to weigh up what this might mean for their response.
- Whilst response 'frameworks' are helpful for some weaker candidates, insisting that all candidates use them actually limits their response and causes their answers to become repetitive.



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