

GCE



Chief Examiner's Report
Religious Studies

Summer Series 2018



Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of CCEA's General Certificate of Education (GCE) in Religious Studies for this series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's microsite on our website at www.ccea.org.uk.

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GCE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Chief Examiner's Report

Introduction

The quality of response generated by candidates in this series, as like last year, was very encouraging. Candidates once again appear to have been well prepared by their centres especially regarding time management. In most cases, responses were very evenly balanced between the (a) and (b) parts of questions with candidates adhering to a 4 X 20-minute strategy to complete their examination paper. It was also apparent that the quality of critical assessment has maintained in quality and centres are to be commended for the good work done here. Candidates are now producing more sustained and developed assessment for their AO2 task. The most successful candidates answered the questions directly and comprehensively, invariably picking up on nuances in the set tasks. The most important advice to candidates is that they should target the actual question on the exam paper and address it directly in their answer. Overall, the various papers provided successful platforms for all candidates to respond positively to the tasks set, while also allowing the stronger candidates to shine. The Ethics module was by far the most popular unit.

Assessment Unit AS 1 An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

In both Section A and Section B of the paper the questions proved equally popular. Candidates did not favour any particular question, which displayed a breath of study and revision which was very positive. Overall, candidates accessed the complete range of bands and there was no evidence of candidates having insufficient time to complete their answers. Candidates appeared to be well prepared for the material on the paper and many candidates achieved highly. The main reason why many candidates did not access the top bands was through failure to fully address the set tasks. Question 1 responses displayed the greatest differentiation. Question 2 exhibited some excellent and insightful answers. Question 3 produced a mixed response with some candidates only covering one aspect of the question, either political or religious. Question 4 exhibited some excellent responses.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** Most candidates approached this question by examining the rejection at Nazareth and what it displayed about the nature of Jesus' ministry. Those candidates who accessed top bands displayed comprehensive understanding of the importance of the rejection for Jesus' future ministry but were also able to recognise Luke's understanding and treatment of the passage. Higher band responses focussed clearly on the two aspects of the question and addressed them fully. Some candidates spoke of rejection in general and deviated into conflict accounts such as Sabbath healing thereby not answering the question and limiting marks available for their response.
- (b)** Candidates who attempted this question generally answered it very well. Most candidates could give examples of Jesus' positive and negative attitudes towards the Law. Many candidates were also able to proffer a counterclaim thereby accessing higher bands as they provided critical analysis in their response. Some candidates did not offer a counterclaim, simply writing about conflict with the religious authorities in general. Overall, the question was answered well, and candidates were clearly able to access the top bands when they focussed fully on debating the claim.

- Q2 (a)** This question produced some excellent and comprehensive answers on the nature of Christian discipleship presented in Luke's Gospel. Candidates who could produce a highly-integrated answer demonstrating knowledge and the significance of relevant texts on the nature of discipleship achieved highly. Those candidates who outlined and listed various points on discipleship without giving examples or developing the points such as call, response, cost were unable to access the higher bands. To access higher bands for this question reference to relevant textual examples was essential.
- (b)** Candidates appeared prepared and well able to debate the claim that the selection of the Twelve was an appropriate choice. Candidates who discussed examples or gave evidence why the selection of the Twelve was a good or bad choice did very well. Those candidates who gave a one-sided response discussing the failure of Peter, Judas or the disciples in general were unable to access higher bands as the question required evaluation of the claim.

Section B

- Q3 (a)** This question elicited a wide variety of responses. Higher band answers clearly demonstrated knowledge and comprehensive understanding of how the religious and political situation impacted on Jesus' ministry. Submissions such as the Pax Romana allowed ease of travel or that conflict led to Jesus' death showed focus on and understanding of the nuance of the question. There were many responses that were clearly Band 5 and exhibited knowledgeable analysis of the religious and political situation in Palestine. Lower band responses tended to focus on retelling the beliefs and practices of the Pharisees and Sadducees without any real reference to how they impacted on Jesus' ministry. Some candidates did not refer to the political situation in Palestine in their answer and in so doing limited available marks.
- (b)** Candidates who accessed the higher bands demonstrated excellent critical analysis proposing a counterclaim to the statement. Band 5 answers provided very good critical analysis and links to Other Aspects of Human Experience. Those candidates accessing top bands gave a variety of examples of how religion can cause conflict but also how there are other reasons for conflict such as political motivations. Many candidates chose to develop a counterclaim based on religion uniting rather than dividing and could discuss ecumenism in a relevant and insightful way.
- Q4 (a)** This question was attempted well, with higher band responses providing excellent focus on the question. Most candidates identified the Parable of the Sower and the Great Banquet although some only provided a narrative account of both. Other candidates could provide commentary and understanding of the parables in relation to the Kingdom of God and were therefore able to access the top bands. Some candidates discussed only one parable while some gave an overview of the Kingdom of God in general. Overall, this question was answered successfully by most candidates.
- (b)** This question generated some good and very diverse answers. Those candidates accessing the higher bands understood the term salvation and what a multi-religious world meant in relation to giving relevant examples. Some candidates struggled to understand what the question was asking and therefore responses were wide-ranging and didn't always answer the question. Other candidates failed to address the aspect of a multi-religious world and thus could not access top bands. Many candidates disregarded the term multi-religious and focused in on secular society which gave the question a different slant and therefore, some answers were not relevant to the question as a result.

Assessment Unit AS 2 An Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles

Once again and in light of the new specification and assessment weightings, candidates appear to have been well prepared and the questions gave the opportunity for the candidates to adequately express what they knew. By and large this was done to a good standard and excellently at times. The majority of candidates responded well to the greater emphasis on critical analysis which suggests a greater emphasis was placed on it in their preparation. The questions that were asked did not prove prohibitive in facilitating candidates from achieving the full range of marks. Candidates of differing abilities had the opportunity to respond positively to the questions. The vast majority of candidates were able to select two questions, one from Section A and one from Section B. Most candidates had ample time to complete the paper. All four of the questions were attempted although some questions were more popular than others, in particular, Questions 2 and 4. There were much fewer answers to Questions 1 and 3. The most successful candidates answered the questions directly and comprehensively.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was not a popular question. The task was approached in a number of ways. The task was seeking to ascertain the candidates' awareness of how the social and historical background helped understanding of the book. In general, responses provided some evidence to deal with both the social and the historical background to Acts. The most successful responses drew on evidence from the Roman, Greek and Jewish cultures of the time that aided understanding of events such as Paul's Missionary Journeys or Peter and John before the Sanhedrin. Some candidates successfully identified the influence of Paul's Roman citizenship as an important factor in the understanding of Acts. Many responses attempted to draw on material from the dating of Acts, authorship, purpose or the historical value of Acts, often with little sophistication.
- (b)** This question provided a variety of answers and in general, most candidates addressed the task adequately. The most successful responses skillfully provided evidence and critical argument, for example, highlighting the positive attitude of both Cornelius and Gallio to Christianity. Furthermore, these responses often established other reasons for the writing of Acts such as the focus on the Holy Spirit of the universal spread of the Gospel. The least successful responses were general in their approach.
- Q2 (a)** This was a very popular question and prompted a large number of responses, the majority of which were very good. The most successful responses dealt explicitly with each of the areas of the task with appropriate evidence of the relevance of the Holy Spirit for faith, work and witness including the events at Pentecost, the appointment of the Seven and Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin. Less successful responses gave a general sense of the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts which did not allow them to achieve Band 5. The least successful candidates took a purely narrative approach and retold incidents of the Holy Spirit in Acts. Some responses did not move beyond the retelling of the Pentecost event.
- (b)** Some candidates had their own interpretation of the term 'fellowship' as evidenced in Acts and saw it simply in terms of friendship or the companionship of, for example, Paul and Barnabas. Some candidates separated fellowship from 'the breaking of the bread'. The most successful responses clearly understood fellowship in terms of 'koinonia' and its outworking in the early Church and

specifically the early chapters of Acts and its relationship to the breaking of bread. They also provided points of contrast and analysis of the centrality of other characteristics such as miracles, worship or preaching.

Section B

- Q3 (a)** This question was not popular. There were a variety of levels of response. The most successful responses sought to clearly answer both aspects of the task. These responses were marked by their ability to provide clear analysis and commentary on the theological content of Paul's speech at Athens and provide context for this speech e.g. the Greek pagan audience whom he was addressing. They also recognized Paul's flexibility in addressing the gospel message to a variety of audiences. The less successful responses took a more narrative approach, simply retelling the content of the speech.
- (b)** Many responses showed confidence in answering the question and provided relevant examples of how religious believers show their faith by their actions and also critically evaluated how this was not always positive. A particular example would have been how some Christian leaders express negative views on Islam and how in turn Christianity could be viewed equally negatively as a result. The most successful responses also showed good skill in establishing an argument. All responses engaged with other aspects of human experience, but the least successful responses merely provided examples without analysis or argument.
- Q4 (a)** This was a very popular question. Candidates with a range of abilities could identify the role and importance of Peter as an evangelist, correctly citing examples from the text such as Pentecost and Cornelius. Many provided a very high level of knowledge and understanding of this particular role of Peter. The most successful responses displayed a degree of sophistication and maturity in their writing. Some responses approached the task as if it was an AO2 task and tried to provide balance with Peter's other roles. Whilst an examination of the statement in the task allowed for some contrast with Peter's other roles, it was his work as an evangelist that was the main quarry of the question. The least successful answers were narrative driven and some focused solely one or two stories about Peter in Acts.
- (b)** The more able candidates were able to utilize their skills of critical analysis, making good reference to other aspects of human experience. The strongest responses showed very good understanding of the key words 'evangelization' and 'secular' in the task. Some focused on examples of how evangelization can happen successfully in a secular age and indeed thrive, citing examples such as the work of Pope Francis. Others provided a critique of how the image of Christianity in a secular age is mostly negative because of church scandals or the moral positions held by some Christian business owners. Many candidates provided statistics for the health or otherwise of Christianity in Britain, Ireland and across the world.

Assessment Unit AS 3

An Introduction to Themes in the Old Testament

Most candidates appeared to find the questions accessible and in general produced answers relevant to the tasks set. It may be noted that while many appeared to devote equal time to Parts (a) and (b) some wrote considerably more about Part (b). In addition, several candidates did not clearly indicate which questions they were attempting. There were also examples of rubric violation. Question 3 was most popular by a considerable margin,

followed by Question 2, then Question 1. Question 4 proved least popular. Overall, the paper provided a successful platform for all candidates to respond positively to the tasks set, while also allowing more able candidates to differentiate themselves.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** Virtually all candidates demonstrated a considerable knowledge of the post-exilic situation encountered by Ezra and Nehemiah, including how, in their different ways, they reacted to it. Stronger answers deployed a greater range of examples and specific level of detail. In this way, they were able to differentiate themselves from responses which tended to be expressed in more general terms. Nearly all candidates simply accepted the purity agenda of the reforms, with few, if any, indicating critical awareness of them, based on significant information in the texts studied and knowledge of the different approaches taken to the reconstitution of Israel on return from exile. This resulted in most answers accepting the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms at face value, with little or no consideration given to harsher aspects of them.
- (b)** Most candidates attempted to address the task with a degree of understanding and success. The most popular approach was through the injunction “you shall not kill” and how this was not always maintained. In exploring the question this way, stronger responses paid greater attention to context and nuance in their attempt to assess the extent to which there was genuine and sustainable contradiction. Few answers started from the obvious point that the Bible contains different documents, traditions and viewpoints, and therefore can appear to contradict itself.
- Q2 (a)** All candidates displayed a level of awareness of how Nathan played an important role in the story of David. For some, this exclusively, or almost exclusively, involved a detailed narrative driven discussion of how Nathan confronted David over his affair with Bathsheba. Within this group, a reasonable number went on to explore how this event resulted in difficulties within David’s family, including the rape of Tamar and the murder of Amnon. Fuller answers put the story of David and Bathsheba in the wider context of Nathan’s position as a court prophet and his crucial role in the establishment of the Davidic covenant in one of the key oracles in the Old Testament. Few, if any, were able to identify the role of Nathan in the development of messianic Davidic theology.
- (b)** Many candidates approached this question in an informed, creative and knowledgeable way. There was considerable evidence that candidates had been introduced to scholarship associated with the terms “minimalist” and “maximalist” though in some instances claims were made about these terms that did not necessarily follow, e.g., that minimalists were by definition atheists. The variety of interesting and creative approaches to specific texts, including appropriate critical awareness, was encouraging. Few candidates made the point that irrespective of the historical accuracy, or otherwise, of the narratives, the texts themselves are irremediably literary, and in scholarly perspective represent the combining of independent sources and traditions.

Section B

- Q3 (a)** There was significant evidence that most candidates had been introduced to the idea that, while in popular imagination Solomon is understood as the epitome of wisdom, the narratives about his reign present a more balanced, complex and critical picture. The most common way in which Solomon’s wisdom was exemplified was through reference to his psalms and proverbial sayings, his

interaction with the Queen of Sheba, and how he made Israel rich and powerful on the international stage. It was widely recognized that he displayed a lack of wisdom in his exploitation of his own people, marrying foreign wives, and permitting the worship of foreign Gods, all of which contributed to the division of the kingdom on his death. Little or no attention was paid to the influence of the Deuteronomistic History, the origins of the wisdom tradition in Ancient Israel or the tension between this and the standards of the Mosaic covenant.

- (b)** Most candidates engaged with the task relevantly and enthusiastically. Drawing from what appeared to be a well-prepared store of largely contemporary examples of how both religious leaders and politicians have acted with morality and a lack of morality, a variety of examples of human experience were cited. The most popular of these included how politicians in Northern Ireland often allow religious beliefs to influence social policy and how various scandals in the church associated with immorality have damaged its witness. More able candidates differentiated themselves by being able to present both sides of a debate in a more sophisticated way. Less successful answers tended to give opinions and list examples rather than argue a case and provide evaluation.
- Q4 (a)** Few candidates attempted this question, but of those who did, nearly all understood the importance of the conflict between Amos and Amaziah, and with varying levels of relevant comment, focused on it. Stronger answers traced the theme of conflict through the book of Amos, referencing conflictual aspects of Amos' visions, and the abrasive nature of his oracles condemning social exploitation and injustice. There was considerable creditable discussion of how conflict related to other themes in the book, particularly hope and restoration. The connection between Bethel and the promise of land in Genesis, and Bethel and the loss of land through exile in Amos was overlooked.
- (b)** Nearly all candidates attempting this task did so by agreeing that the true prophetic voice creates opposition and helps the marginalized. In addition to Liberation Theology, figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Oscar Romero, Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela appeared prominently in many answers. Able candidates were more successful in exploring how the prophetic voice could emerge in both religious and secular contexts. It should be noted that, while examples of arguments supporting the view that the true prophetic voice creates opposition and assists the marginalized were strong, the counter-argument tended to be less well developed or, in a few cases, non-existent.

Assessment Unit AS 4

The Origins and Development of the Early Christian Church to AD 325

The feedback from the examining team was that this paper allowed candidates of varied ability to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the Early Christian Church. They had the opportunity to explore various aspects of the specification and show their skill at evaluating, including in the context of other aspects of human experience. The questions allowed strong candidates to show the breadth and depth of their knowledge and offer mature and insightful analysis and evaluation. The majority were able to attempt two questions with reasonable success. Many coped very well with the demands of the Part (b) parts across the examination paper. As with last year, responses were evenly balanced, and it is evident that centres have adjusted well to the change in weighting of the Assessment Objectives and have given increasing focus on developing the skills of candidates with regards to evaluation and other aspects of human experience. However, it is essential that

candidates address the specifics of the question asked, focusing on the key words in each task. There was a very small number of candidates who broke the rubric and as a result reduced their maximum scoring potential to 50 marks. In Section A, Question 1 was less popular than Question 2, while in Section B Questions 3 and 4 were equally popular.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** The task here for candidates was to select relevant material from Justin's Apologies and his Dialogue with Trypho, and apply this to the task. Top band responses focused on the main arguments in Justin's writings and highlighted how these challenged both pagan and Jewish beliefs about Christianity. It was gratifying to see some excellent use of relevant quotations. Many candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of Justin's writing but failed to directly link their answer to Jewish and pagan beliefs. However, suitable credit was given even if the question was answered by default. Lower scoring answers may have focused on biographical details, including martyrdom, with limited reference to the content of his writings. It is worth reminding candidates of the necessity to get to the task quickly and to avoid spending valuable minutes writing a long introduction which will not contribute to the marks achieved.
- (b)** Some candidates focused on Justin's earlier pursuit of various philosophies as evidence to support the claim. However, they made no reference to the Greek philosophical aspect of his writings, in particular his theology of the Logos. Some responses addressed this and gave a balanced discussion of the claim, highlighting the many aspects of Justin's writings which were easy to understand including his account of the sacraments. The better responses were also able to consider Justin's Roman audience to whom his Apologies were addressed and used this as evidence that his writings were meant for a wider populace.
- Q2 (a)** As with any question on Constantine, there is a danger that candidates write everything they know. In some cases, this included tracing his rise to power as well as his 'conversion' on the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge. It is essential that students focus on the emphasis of the question and ensure that they are able to select the relevant information. It would appear that some candidates had limited awareness of Constantine's religious policy and so digressed to writing about the possible duality of his motives in converting to Christianity. Top scoring responses explained how his policy affected the Church – positively, for example, the Edict of Milan, making Sunday a day of rest, the production of Bibles, the return of confiscated property and the erection of new churches. Some candidates focused entirely on the positives of the policy and still scored well. Top responses also highlighted the negative aspects of his policy, for example, how the Church allowed him involvement in internal affairs and the rise in nominal Christianity.
- (b)** Some candidates repeated material already included in their Part (a) so could not receive double credit. More successful responses offered a range of new material in relation to how the Church had already triumphed, for example, how in spite of earlier persecutions and misunderstanding by Roman society, it had grown and was more widely accepted by pagans. Many offered clear evidence from topics they had studied across the specification to show how Christianity was already a considerable force in Roman society prior to Constantine. This included reference to how there were Christians across all levels of society including the imperial household and among the well-educated. They also highlighted Constantine's significant role in furthering the cause of the Church without unnecessary repetition of material. For example, reference was made to

how he acted as a catalyst for Christianity becoming the state religion and how he prevented further persecution by Licinius. Some candidates also highlighted the importance of divine providence and concluded that the triumph of the Church was the result of a series of inseparable and inter-dependent factors.

Section B

- Q3 (a)** While this was a popular question, many candidates focused on the content of the letters, often in considerable detail, but struggled to show how they demonstrated the Roman attitude to Christianity. Credit was given where responses addressed the issue indirectly. Top band responses clearly drew out from the letters the relevant information to address the quotation. A minority of candidates were able to reference Tertullian and/or scholars to explain why the Emperor's policy was contradictory and/or pragmatic. As always, it is good to see the accurate use of relevant quotations.
- (b)** The majority of candidates made a reasonable attempt at this question, often challenging the view with clear examples exploring the reality and severity of persecution in some countries today. Responses sometimes referred to persecution outside of Christianity such as the Rohingya Muslims and Islamophobia in western society. Examples used were varied and highlighted the serious nature of persecution faced by many. Top scoring responses discussed the role of the media in reporting or neglecting to report incidents, and contrasts were made with western secular society showing how persecution is different, yet also could be perceived by some as a serious threat to religious freedom. Lower band responses related vague accounts of persecutions but failed to evaluate the view.
- Q4 (a)** This is a very straightforward question but responses to it were wide ranging. Top scoring answers were focused and detailed in relation to the Didache and Hippolytus. Some candidates referred briefly to other sources but used them as appropriate links to show the development which was taking place in relation to baptism. A significant minority of candidates wrote about all the sources specified in the specification and as a result usually gave limited detail on the two highlighted in the question. It is essential that candidates develop the skill of targeting the actual question and address it directly in their answer. Low scoring responses often contained confused information.
- (b)** This question was not particularly well answered by some candidates who failed to refer to other aspects of human experience, not getting beyond the taught course mentioning only Ignatius and Justin. As a result, they could not score highly. Top scoring responses referred to the important work of modern writers such as, for example, C.S. Lewis and A. McGrath. They offered a balanced discussion of their contribution. Some candidates digressed and referred to modern day Christian preachers or charities that defend the faith by their actions. Whilst some credit was given, the stated claim must be the focus of the response.

Assessment Unit AS 5

The Celtic Church in Ireland in the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Centuries

The feedback from the examining team indicated that the paper was accessible to candidates. There was clear evidence that questions differentiated well between candidates of various abilities. In Section A, Question 1 was most popular. In Section B, Question 3 was very popular with fewer candidates attempting Question 4. Time management was an issue for only a small number of candidates. In AO1 tasks it was clear that most candidates were well prepared and focused on the question asked. In the AO2 tasks most candidates included critical analysis and in Section B included other aspects of human experience. A minority of candidates did not engage sufficiently in critical analysis. The importance of informed arguments which attempt to critically analyse the focus of the question is a key skill in AO2 tasks.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was a highly popular question. Most candidates successfully examined the origins of Irish Monasticism. Stronger responses focused on the issue of Britain's influence and the importance of centres such as Candida Casa and Wales in terms of the origins of Monasticism in Ireland. Some of the strongest responses gave a detailed outline of the role of Britain in introducing monasticism to Ireland and exploring other influences that may have made a contribution to the origins of Irish Monasticism. A minority of responses focussed on the origins of monasticism generally without discussing Britain's influence. A small number of candidates focused on the arrival of Christianity into Ireland and made little reference to the origins of monasticism in Ireland.
- (b)** The majority of candidates showed a clear awareness of the importance of monasteries in the Celtic Church. Stronger responses, while examining the importance of the monasteries, focused in particular on whether their importance in the Celtic Church and society had been greatly exaggerated. These responses looked in detail at evidence to suggest that the importance of the monasteries was exaggerated. A small number of less successful responses focussed on the work of monasteries generally or the daily routine of a monk.
- Q2 (a)** Most candidates were able to successfully discuss the features of the Celtic Penitentials. Candidates had a clear understanding of a range of features common across all Penitential works. Stronger responses were able to examine the features of the Penitentials with specific textual references from both Finnian and Columbanus to illustrate points made. Some excellent responses were familiar with the Penitential writers, the features of the penitential documents and gave very specific examples from the Penitential texts that illustrated the features explored. A small number of candidates discussed penitential practice generally or merely outlined basic biographical details about Finnian and Columbanus.
- (b)** The majority of candidates were able to discuss how sexual behaviour was addressed in the Penitentials. More successful responses analysed both the way in which the Penitentials played a negative role in addressing sexual behaviour and how the Penitentials supported people to understand Christian beliefs on sexuality. Some excellent responses used a range of examples and evidence from the Penitential documents to support points made. While there were some very good responses demonstrating critical analysis, some less successful responses

did not focus on the role of the Penitentials in addressing the issue of sexual behaviour. These responses tended to either discuss how the Penitentials could be seen as negative generally or focus on how the Penitentials are of little value.

Section B

- Q3 (a)** This was a very popular question with some excellent responses that focussed on the two themes of denunciation and repentance with carefully chosen textual references to support points made. These responses were characterised by a clear understanding of both themes with a detailed outline of, for example, Patrick's concern for Coroticus and his men to repent and the denunciation of Coroticus, his soldiers and the British Clergy. A minority of candidates chose to focus on a wider range of themes and not just the two themes in the question. A small number of less successful responses did not offer any examples or evidence from Patrick's Letter to Coroticus.
- (b)** Most candidates were able to explore how faith and prayer support those people experiencing times of trouble. Stronger responses engaged in critical analysis using other aspects of human experience to show that there are times when faith and prayer are vital but other times when a different response is, perhaps, equally important. Candidates engaged in critical analysis using a variety of other aspects of human experience including the importance of faith and prayer in troubled times in scripture, individuals who relied on faith and prayer, individuals who relied on other supports and the importance of faith and prayer in different world religions. A small number of less successful responses used taught course material, such as Patrick's prayer life, and did not address other aspects of human experience.
- Q4 (a)** This was the least popular question but those candidates who did attempt this question tended to produce responses that were focussed on the question asked. Some very good responses explored a range of questions concerning the reliability of Celtic Hagiography. Excellent responses were characterised by not only the variety of questions they explored about the reliability of hagiography, but also the way they used textual references from Cogitosus' Life of Brigit to illustrate points made. Less successful responses merely outlined parts of Cogitosus' Life of Brigit without reference to questions concerning the reliability of hagiography.
- (b)** A minority of candidates in addressing this question chose to confine discussion to the challenges faced by those in religious life as opposed to evaluating the view that personal integrity is not critical for the religious life. Stronger responses were focussed on the question asked with some excellent answers analysing the importance of personal integrity for the religious life using a range of other aspects of human experience to support arguments made. A minority of candidates struggled to focus on the issue of personal integrity with some ignoring this focus completely and instead writing about religious life generally.

Assessment Unit AS 6 An Introduction to Islam

The majority of candidates were able to select two questions, one from Section A and one from Section B. Most candidates managed to complete the paper in the time. It was interesting and encouraging to see that candidates had divided their time equally in order to give time to the AO2 task. There was a marked improvement in the way in which AO2 tasks were handled. All four of the questions were attempted although some questions were more popular than others. It was clear that candidates were well prepared for the examination and the questions were accessible to them. The examination did allow candidates to respond at their own level.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was a popular question. There were some comprehensive answers where candidates were able to focus their response on the question and were able to select material relating to key events and people from Muhammad's life, as well as dealing with the more challenging aspects of the question which were to explain the importance or impact of these. These responses demonstrated both detailed knowledge and understanding, which was often underpinned by scholarship. Weaker responses outlined Muhammad's life without trying to address the question. Some responses demonstrated a very basic, narrow or general knowledge of aspects of Muhammad's life, or did not address 'importance' or 'impact'.
- (b)** Some candidates were able to refer to a wide range of evidence to evaluate whether Muhammad's call to be a prophet was the most significant moment of his life. Most agreed with the statement and suggested reasons why the call was significant e.g. it changed the direction of his life, it enabled him to preach and spread the faith, it gave him courage and reassurance. In a number of cases this was all that was offered and there was no attempt at a counter-argument or looking at the claim from a different perspective. Similarly, some responses only looked at counter-arguments. Ideally, candidates should be encouraged to offer a balanced or diverse argument to access higher marks. The strongest responses were those where alternative or counter-arguments were used and there were clear, critical and developed arguments. Weaker responses tended to offer very few arguments, were one-sided, were repetitious or lacked development.
- Q2 (a)** This was not a popular question but in the main was handled well. Comprehensive responses were able to target all of the aspects of the question e.g. the different content and style of the Surahs from Mecca and Medina, offered discussion about the challenges related to identifying the origins of these Surahs, or how they offer important information about the progression of the Islamic faith and community. The most informed answers were able to illustrate their comments with direct reference to the Qur'an. Some responses, however, found it challenging to offer detail and as a result the answers were generalised. The weaker responses tended to present knowledge in a partial way or did not offer any explanatory comments to demonstrate understanding. As this is a new area on the revised specification it was encouraging to see that candidates were well prepared for it and hopefully with the guidance of the Mark Scheme, confidence will grow in relation to this topic.
- (b)** Some candidates were able to refer to a range of arguments to evaluate the accuracy of the quotation. Most candidates were able to offer a balanced argument where they began by agreeing with the statement, for example, the Qur'an is the word of Allah, but its interpretation is challenging, or the teaching

and example of Muhammad is helpful to Muslims. Many candidates then looked at alternative or counter-arguments and considered other aspects of Islam which are much more significant than the Sunnah and Hadith such as faith in Allah, Muhammad, the community, the family. The strongest responses were those where there were clear, critical and developed arguments. Weaker responses tended to only offer descriptions of Sunnah and Hadith without making use of this material to write a critical analysis. Some answers offered a limited number of arguments, which were repetitious or lacked development.

Section B

- Q3 (a)** This was a popular question. Comprehensive answers offered a detailed summary of both aspects of the question and considered both Zakat and Sawm. The most successful responses were able to offer accurate information and explanatory comments throughout. The responses which accessed the upper bands therefore were able to target all aspects of the question and in particular address the most challenging aspect of the question which was about the beliefs which were evident in these pillars, e.g. ummah, afterlife, devotion, submission, purifying of money, forgiveness. Some answers were quite general or did not refer to both pillars. There was a wide range in the quality of the answers to this question. The level of detail, explanation and development served to differentiate between the responses.
- (b)** Some answers considered how religious rituals could give a person a sense of identity and belonging to a religious community and used rituals such as prayer, public worship, festivals, communion, baptism and aspects of the Jewish religion to defend this. Some responses considered possible counter-claims to the statement, arguing that some rituals do not give a sense of identity such as festivals like Christmas and Easter, or sometimes people participate in rituals for the wrong reasons and they do not give a sense of identity or perhaps other aspects of a religion give a stronger sense of identity such as family, religious community, a sacred text. The majority of responses did try to draw arguments from other aspects of human experience, which was encouraging. However, there can be a tendency to offer description rather than using material to produce a strong critical assessment. Some responses drew on Islamic rituals to answer the question, which was a pity. In some cases there seemed to be some confusion as to what 'ritual' meant. The most successful responses were those which were able to focus on the question, focus on critical assessment, offer a counter-argument and make a number of points which were defended with human experience. Candidates need to be careful not to allow taught course material to dominate their responses as it limits their time and the overall quality of the response.
- Q4 (a)** This was a popular question and, in general, handled well. The most successful responses were those which focused on the different aspects of the question e.g. the centrality of the mosque, its design and its use. Comprehensive answers demonstrated both knowledge and understanding. A number of responses did not address the quotation or did not address the design and use of the mosque. Some responses indicated that the candidates had interpreted the question as a critical analysis and felt they had to balance arguments. As it is an AO1 task, this was not required. The quality of detailed knowledge of the exterior and interior of a mosque and how these feature in preparing for worship and in worship itself did serve to distinguish between the answers offered.

- (b)** Candidates coped quite well with this question although some found it challenging. The most successful answers were those where there was clear critical analysis supported by other aspects of human experience. A number of responses were able to consider possible limitations of sacred texts, such as the challenge of interpretation, the challenge of the times in which we live and the new issues which are being presented to religious communities. A number of responses considered the significance of key people such as church leaders, local religious communities, the role of tradition, the authority of the Pope. Most were able to offer a counter argument and suggest that the word of God should be adequate to guide humanity and it has a timeless relevance. Many answers were able to integrate other aspects of human experience in a relevant way and reinforce the points being made. The most successful responses were those which focused on critical assessment, offered a counter-argument, made a number of points and then defended these with examples drawn from human experience. A number of responses were using the Islamic Sunnah and Hadith to answer the question, which was taught course material. While a brief reference to taught course material may be appropriate, care needs to be taken so that taught course material does not dominate, as it limits access to higher mark bands.

Assessment Unit AS 7 Foundations of Ethics with Special Reference to Issues in Medical Ethics

The question paper appeared to be successful in that it allowed all learners to respond to the questions posed yet effectively differentiated between candidates of differing abilities with higher order candidates clearly engaging with the set task and offering highly focused answers as a result. While examiners noted that the quality of response has improved with the new Specification, some were of the view that in this examination paper the quality of the AO2 response shaded that of the AO1. As with the examination last year responses tended to be evenly balanced between the (a) and (b) parts of the question which is probably reflective of the strategy being used by candidates for the completion of the paper – 4 X 20 minute answers. This discipline is to be highly commended as it is clearly affording candidates with the opportunity to maximise their marks across the examination paper. As always, the most important advice to candidates is to target the actual question on the paper and address it directly in their answer.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was the most popular question by far and those candidates who chose it were for the most part very familiar with the contribution of Bentham and Mill, especially dealing with Mill's development of Bentham's ideas. Most candidates gave clear and well-informed responses on both figures with the better answers responding to the specific task through distinguishing between quantitative happiness (Bentham) and qualitative happiness (Mill). In doing this these same candidates had clearly in mind the quotation that prefaced the task with some of them referring to the statement throughout. Some candidates included the ideas of Singer and Preference Utilitarianism though the consideration of this could have been more effectively integrated into the discussion offered on the understanding of happiness. Overall, while a good grasp of utilitarian theory was evident, focusing on the distinction between quantitative and qualitative happiness set the stronger candidates apart.

- (b)** This task was generally well answered with most candidates able to provide balanced critical assessment of the quality of life principle as against the sanctity of life principle with relevant exemplification, with most candidates drawing on euthanasia. A number of candidates did not profile the sanctity of life argument opting instead to consider the quantity of life argument (mortality) as against quality of life (morbidity). Bearing in mind that this examination is a paper on Religious Ethics, the stronger responses were those that considered the sanctity of life point of view. Weaker responses tended to only consider quality of life giving examples with little scope given to counter argument. A number of well informed answers were able to mention QALYS (Quality Adjusted Life Years) which is now used in health care.
- Q2 (a)** In general this question was not managed well by candidates. A number of those who attempted this question were unfamiliar with embryo research with some writing instead about IVF and surrogacy. Other candidates who were familiar with the topic were stronger on one part of the question, for example, religious problems as against ethical issues. Some candidates just wrote about embryo research without dealing with religious and ethical issues. The more effective responses (and there were some) knew the topic well and dealt with the set task, probing relevant religious and ethical problems with reference to specific biblical/church teaching and ethical theory.
- (b)** Stronger candidates in responding to the set question were aware of “traditional” religious and ethical standards such as Sacred Scripture, Natural Moral Law and Kantian Ethics. These same candidates used the language of the question and were able to refer to developments in reproductive technology, offering well informed and balanced critical assessment with some arguing that from a utilitarian perspective we should not hinder human well-being and progress. However, some candidates attempted to answer both parts of Question 2 using the same content and thus simply repeated views already expressed in Part (a).

Section B

- Q3 (a)** This was the most popular question in this section and was generally well answered with most candidates displaying real familiarity with the contents of the Sermon. In recounting the contents most focused on the Beatitudes, the sayings on salt and light, the antitheses and the Golden Rule. Stronger responses were those that dealt with the set task, articulating clearly how the Sermon guides Christians in moral decision making. Some candidates missed this element and instead just imparted knowledge and understanding of the Sermon. A few candidates confused the Sermon with the Decalogue.
- (b)** This part was generally well answered with stronger responses picking up on “continues to be relevant” drawing upon examples from other aspects of human experience. These same responses were able to use examples to illuminate their arguments, thus ensuring that real and meaningful critical assessment was offered. There were some highly impressive answers that employed specific views from various figures such as Peter Singer, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Fry and Alain de Botton. Weaker responses tended to focus on the relevance of religious faith than on biblical ethics with some not engaging with other aspects of human experience.
- Q4 (a)** This was the least popular question on the examination paper which also elicited some of the poorest responses. It appears that a number of candidates were unfamiliar with the application of the Doctrine of Double Effect in abortion

despite it being specifically listed in the Specification where explicit mention is made of issues “surrounding therapeutic abortion and the doctrine of double effect”. Some candidates just wrote about the general arguments in the abortion debate with no mention of the Doctrine of Double Effect. Other candidates demonstrated awareness of the doctrine but were unable to develop their response. Very few candidates were able to deal with the doctrine in relation to abortion effectively. These same candidates were well able to distinguish between direct and indirect therapeutic abortion.

- (b) This task elicited a mixed response from candidates. The quality of the response offered depended very much on the candidate’s familiarity with the word “sovereignty” despite it being specifically listed in the Specification. Some confused sovereignty with the Sanctity of Life principle. The stronger responses were those that were clearly familiar with the concept and were able to offer real and meaningful critical assessment drawing on examples from other aspects of human experience to illuminate their arguments. A number used the examples of Sarah Ewart (abortion) and Diane Pretty (euthanasia) while some looked at sovereignty in relation to suicide.

Assessment Unit AS 8 An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

There was an increase in candidates sitting this module. The majority of candidates responded to the two questions within the time allocated and there was little if any evidence of rubric violations. The questions seemed accessible to all candidates with differentiation primarily seen in the depth and breadth of responses to the tasks set. High band responses directly engaged with the question set often providing very relevant evidence and example to support their responses. There were some very strong AO2 responses in evidence, with candidates providing reasoned and extremely well-informed argument, often successfully integrating diverse scholarly views. It was good to see that there was very little reference to taught course content recorded within Question 3 (b) and Question 4 (b). It is clear that candidates are prepared to explore other aspects of human experience as part of their Section B debates as the Specification requires.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was the most popular question in Section A. Top band responses examined both the nature of the problem of evil and explored one chosen solution as the task demanded. Many candidates cited the Inconsistent Triad, with a number exploring the Epicurean Paradox in some depth. Differentiation of response was seen in the depth and breadth of the exploration of the problem of suffering and evil and a selected theodicy. Most candidates referenced the distinction between moral and natural evil and in some cases, very relevant examples of evil and suffering were cited. The most popular solution explored by candidates was the Augustinian theodicy although the Irenaean theodicy, the Freewill Defence and the views of Process theology were also explored by some. Most candidates referenced biblical teaching as part of their responses, for example, the Creation and Fall narratives in Genesis, or the Book of Job. While the question required the candidates to explore one solution, at times candidates simply related two or three theodicies without drawing links between them (note, theodicies emphasising freewill in its different forms could be linked). In some cases, candidates provided lengthy criticisms of their chosen solution, at times longer than the actual theodicy cited. In some responses very little was recorded on the nature of the problem of evil with candidates focusing primarily/exclusively on solution to the problem.

- (b)** This debate was particularly well handled by candidates. It was clear candidates had knowledge of and were prepared to challenge a number of theistic responses to the problem of suffering and evil. Differentiation was seen in the range of supporting evidence and examples explored by candidates within their responses. Most candidates critiqued two or more theodicies. Schleiermacher's trifold critique of the Augustinian theodicy was frequently explored, as was the contribution of scholars and writers such as Hume, Dawkins, Fry, Camus and Dostoyevsky. In some cases, candidates narrated each theodicy at some length. It should be remembered that the central focus of the task was evaluative i.e. does this theodicy fail to offer a solution to the problem or not. Some candidates identified specific problems of suffering and evil that believers have difficulty addressing such as the suffering of innocents, the scale of suffering and/or the arbitrary nature of suffering. Wiles' reflection of the type of deity who intervened sporadically was seen in a number of responses (in some cases accompanied by Swinburne's analogy of the loving parent who occasionally will break their own rules). Elements of the Freewill Defence in particular was used to counter the stated claim.
- Q2 (a)** This was also a popular question. While most candidates discussed the central criticisms that have been levelled against miracles, top band responses also very successfully integrated the quotation namely that 'all miracles are coincidence' into their responses. The teachings of Holland and Dawkins were successfully woven into a number of candidates' responses. Holland's train analogy in particular was frequently used to support the stated claim. Most candidates successfully presented Hume's critique of miracles, with differentiation being seen in the precision of the evidence provided to support his rejection of miracle. In some cases, candidates explored theistic support for miracles, notably Aquinas' views supporting miracles, and while some support for miracle could be accredited (to counter atheism's rejection of miracle) it should be remembered that the primary focus of the question was on 'the central criticisms that have been levelled against miracles'.
- (b)** There were some very strong responses to this debate, with candidates often exploring the benefits of belief in miracles per se and a range of philosophical arguments for and against belief in miracle. Swinburne's teachings in support of a belief in miracles was particularly popular as was Dawkins and Hitchens rejection of all forms of Divine intervention. Wiles' argument of the inconsistency of a God who intervened in minor healings and yet failed to act in cases of genocide was explored by a number of candidates. While examples of contemporary and/or historical miracles could be successfully employed to sustain candidate's critical arguments, in some cases rather lengthy narratives of miraculous healings were recorded with simply the inference that 'this means that miracles do happen'. The centrality of Jesus' resurrection for Christians was mentioned within some answers.

Section B

- Q3 (a)** This was the most popular question in Section B by a considerable margin. Top band responses clearly identified the contribution of Descartes to the Ontological argument while also identifying the origins of Descartes' argument in Anslem's earlier work. There were some good responses to this task with candidates exploring Descartes' exploration of the implications of the concept of a perfect God. A number of candidates noted Descartes' background as a mathematician as influencing his work, including his triangle analogy. Several candidates also referenced Descartes' teaching that limited human consciousness would not be

aware of a perfect God without the reality of his existence. Most candidates also noted development of the Ontological argument by subsequent scholars notably Malcolm and Plantinga. Note while some candidates clearly honed in on the question set, in some cases candidates simply delineated a pre-prepared answer on the Ontological argument without integrating their information to best match the set task.

- (b)** Top band responses referenced specifically the challenges of secularisation both for society and for religion. It was good to see candidates using very relevant contemporary examples such as changes in attitude and/or legislation regarding abortion and same sex marriage. The extent to which secularisation supported female empowerment was explored by a number of candidates. While many candidates argued that secularisation brought greater freedom of choice and freed scientific enquiry from restrictions often placed upon it by religious belief systems, the risks of secularisation was also explored, with candidates arguing that secularisation brought about ‘a culture of death’. In some cases, candidates also explored the reasons for the growth of secularisation within society. Many candidates began their responses by defining the term secularisation. On occasion candidates interpreted secularisation to mean atheism, and while there is obvious overlap between the two terms, the question did specify ‘the process of secularisation’. A number of candidates noted that secular states had declared the continued importance of freedom of religious belief and thought. France’s secularist position concerning the display of religious symbols within state schools was evaluated within responses. The impact of Communist States too was referenced in a number of responses. While many candidates identified the dangers of religious extremism, frequently citing the example of ISIS, most also opted to explore the benefits of religious belief for society.

- Q4 (a)** Few candidates opted to respond to this question and there was some considerable diversity in level of response to this task. Top band responses explored Otto’s views on religious experience notably his teachings on the numinous and ‘mysterium tremendum et fascinans’. In some cases, candidates made little reference to Otto’s ideas as the question demanded and simply explored religious experience and/or mysticism in general. Most candidates defined what was meant by the term “religious experience”. A number of candidates identified Otto’s key writings, for example, his view of God as ‘wholly other’ and referenced influences on Otto including Husserl and Schleiermacher.
- (b)** Once again there was some diversity in levels of response to this task, nonetheless, there were some very strong responses to this question. Top band responses tackled the task directly and very successfully. In some cases, candidates identified a clash between atheistic and theistic world views rather than the more specific debate namely the clash between faith and reason. Top band candidates explored both areas of conflict between faith and reason before arguing that in fact the two did not always stand in opposition, citing examples of where theism actively supports the use of reason and logic. Popular thinkers cited included Einstein, Dawkins, Wittgenstein and Swinburne. Very relevant examples of past and contemporary conflict were explored by a number of candidates, including differing views as to the source of truth, differing views concerning Divine Creation and the implication of these differences. The primacy of faith and fideism together with the potential risk of placing faith above reason, as seen in cases of religious fanaticism/violence was explored within some responses.

Chief Examiner's Report

Introduction

The quality of response, given that this was a new Specification, was very encouraging. In many ways it mirrored the performance in the new AS Specification last year. As with the AS, candidates appear to have been well prepared by their centres especially regarding time management considering the new assessment weightings. It seemed that candidates were well disciplined spending approximately 15 minutes on their AO1 task and 25 minutes on the AO2 task. Most candidates were able to deliver on all their tasks within the time permitted. Unlike the legacy, the AO1 responses were much more focused while AO2 answers were more developed with examiners of the view that they were often the strongest parts of the candidates' work. The improvement in the quality of the critical assessment skill which was noticed by examiners last year at AS level has clearly carried through to A2 level. As always, the more successful candidates were those who dealt with the specific task. These candidates demonstrated a consistent ability to unpick questions and target precisely what the question was looking for in their answers. Examiners were also of a view that the new Synoptic Assessment worked much better than that of the legacy Specification. Most candidates were clearly familiar with the guidance that had been issued on this element of the examination and sought to follow it faithfully. Examiners commented that there was greater variation in the work from centres with originality much more to the fore. Some work remains to be done on ensuring that the link with the other unit of study is as meaningful and cogent as possible. The more successful responses here were those who identified an apt and relevant link and married it well into their answer ensuring that it did not come across as an "add on". It must be said however that some candidates spent disproportionate time providing what was unneeded context which because of the time constraint often meant that another part of the answer (usually the link) was compromised. On the plus side few candidates fell foul of the double credit rule, which was most encouraging. The module on Global Ethics was by far the most popular unit of study with a significant increase in the candidature for Philosophy of Religion as well.

Assessment Unit A2 1 Themes in the Synoptic Gospels

Question 2 was the most popular question in Section A. Most candidates attempted this question with varying degrees of success. Question 3 was the least attempted question and produced the most diverse range of marks. In general, the Synoptic Question was answered well. Answers showed candidates had been well prepared for the area. However, many candidates failed to provide any link to their other area of study which is fundamental to Synoptic Assessment. Legibility of handwriting was an issue in this series in a small number of scripts. Some candidates were unable to answer two questions from Section A. All candidates attempted the Synoptic Question. Most candidates have developed the skill of effective time management under exam conditions. Those who did not complete the paper generally spent too much time on one question.

Section A

Q1 (a) This was a very popular question. Those candidates who accessed higher bands not only gave a knowledgeable account of Luke's sources but also provided examples from each source and discussed the significance and use of the source. This provided comprehensive understanding of the sources of Luke. Many candidates also discussed the Proto-Luke theory and the possible use of Matthew's Gospel competently, thereby accessing the top bands. Some

candidates focussed their answer on solutions to the synoptic problem but failed to discuss the main sources used by Luke. These answers could not achieve the higher bands as they did not address the question fully.

- (b)** Many candidates found this question difficult to grasp and therefore this question elicited a wide variety of responses. Higher band answers referred clearly to Markan priority and considered the implications of Matthew's and Luke's redaction of Mark. Many candidates could discern the underlying thrust of the question in relation to Markan priority and apply their knowledge to evaluating the question – these answers scored highly. Some looked at the approach of narrative criticism and argued sources are not important looking at the Gospels as a whole is. When done well, these answers showed competence deserving of a top band. Some argued that the different Gospels authenticated each other. Lower band responses tended to simply outline some arguments for and against Markan priority.
- Q2 (a)** This question was exceptionally popular and produced some comprehensive answers on the nature of the title Son of Man. Overall, candidates explored the Son of Man as both human and divine. Those candidates accessing higher bands could elaborate further, using references to the relevant Old Testament texts. Higher band answers explored concepts such as suffering, eschatological judgement and Jesus' use of the Son of Man title. It is important to note the importance of this as many responses lacked references to relevant texts and therefore did not develop the understanding of Jesus' person and mission. To access higher bands, reference to relevant textual examples was essential. Some candidates treated this question as an evaluation because of the quotation and attempted to evaluate the title referring to Son of God as a better alternative. Lower band answers often simply exhibited basic knowledge of the title with no understanding.
- (b)** Those candidates who developed one side of the argument discussing how the ethics of Jesus were only relevant to modern Christians or a general answer on the relevancy of the ethics and whether they are achievable, were not able to access higher bands as evaluation was not present. Many candidates were stronger on one side of the argument and therefore did not proffer a counterclaim or analysis. Some candidates also confused the Ten Commandments as the ethics of Jesus. Candidates accessing higher bands focused on whether these ethics were only for Christians and could competently discuss ideas such as Rahner's "anonymous Christian", how Jesus' ethics overlap with other religions and how some of the ethical teaching may no longer be relevant in a pluralistic society.
- Q3 (a)** This question did not prove popular with candidates. It appeared that some candidates that attempted the question were not aware of the distinctive features of Matthew's resurrection account and simply gave a somewhat general account of the resurrection merging details from all three Gospel accounts. Those candidates achieving higher bands displayed a thorough knowledge of Matthew's resurrection account and how his account is distinctive, whilst linking this to what it says about Matthew's theological perspective overall.
- (b)** Those candidates accessing higher bands gave a variety of examples of how the resurrection is an essential part of the Christian faith including scriptural references to elaborate on their argument. Higher band answers used their knowledge of arguments for and against the resurrection to assess the focus of the question - whether you can still be a Christian and not believe in the resurrection. Many evaluated the meaning of the resurrection and its

importance today. Some counter arguments referred to other parts of the faith that are 'more essential' than the resurrection such as Jesus' death. Lower band answers simply argued for and against the historicity of the resurrection without addressing the 'essential part of the faith' aspect of the question. Other candidates took a different approach and assessed the various theories for and against the idea of resurrection such as the Swoon theory. This approach often lacked focus on the question.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** In general, there was a good attempt to focus on religious texts and how they are interpreted. Some candidates failed to reference their other unit of study or used specifically taught course material from this unit of study. Many candidates however had obviously thoroughly prepared for the synoptic question and were able to score very highly. Most candidates understood that they only needed to make one developed link with their other unit of study. Those candidates that achieved higher bands could discuss one example and use this example consistently throughout their answer. The most popular examples used were abortion and homosexuality. Band 5 answers developed their example and rooted their answer clearly in scripture while discussing the idea that interpretation of religious texts is not straightforward when dealing with such issues. Higher band answers could give specific examples from a religious text and explain how different interpretations created problems, whilst giving a relevant example from their other unit of study. Many candidates, who accessed the lower bands, did not address the crux of the synoptic question and failed to make any link or reference to another unit of study. Lower band answers also failed to focus on one example throughout the answer. Reference to scripture was often superficial or in some cases non-existent.
- (b)** This question was answered particularly well by most candidates. Higher band answers provided good debate and relevant examples of other aspects of human experience. In general, Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa and Pope Francis were popular examples used to discuss influential religious leaders and the referendum to repeal the 8th amendment in the Republic of Ireland featured heavily. Higher band answers gave relevant examples of modern religious leaders and described how our changing society is weakening the link between religious faith and the state. Candidates were also able to provide examples of societies where religious leaders are heavily involved in society and present counter arguments outlining why they are still important. Lower band responses struggled to provide analysis of the view and often confused religious and political leadership with some citing the example of Hitler and Donald Trump as influential religious leaders.

Assessment Unit A2 2

Themes in the Selected Letters of St. Paul

Candidates appear to have been well prepared and the questions gave the opportunity for the candidates to adequately express what they knew. In the main this was done to a good standard and excellently at times. In light of the new specification and assessment weightings there was a greater emphasis placed on critical analysis and the majority of the candidates responded well to this change. However, in Part (a) tasks there was a different challenge than in the previous series. Some responses showed that candidates were including material that was perhaps extraneous to the task and as a result, were not entirely focused. The questions facilitated candidates to access the full range of marks

and candidates of differing abilities had the opportunity to respond positively to the tasks set. The new approach to synoptic assessment had been clearly understood and embraced by many centres. There were some responses however, that struggled to deal with this task. Most candidates had ample time to complete the paper. All three of the questions in Section A were attempted although some questions were more popular than others, in particular Questions 1 and 2. Centres should be aware that there was some evidence of scholarly quotations being contrived by candidates which were not creditworthy.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was a popular question. It provided the challenge of knowing what information from ch1-6 to include. Some responses focused mainly on chs1-2 in addressing the accusations made against Paul. The most successful responses were able to draw on relevant material from throughout the Letter e.g. the allegory with Abraham, Hagar and Sarah while a few drew on material from chs 5-6. Many responses displayed at times a comprehensive analysis of the task and very good use of scholarship and accurate textual quotations. Some less successful responses made little reference to the question and either gave a general summary of Galatians or a commentary on a section of the Letter that they knew well.
- (b)** Many answers offered a focused and critical response in relation to the claim that Paul's teaching in Corinthians and Galatians provided moral guidance for today. Many candidates made good use of modern examples to illustrate their arguments. Some answers considered reasons why Paul's teaching was outdated and drew on examples such as modern attitudes to marriage and divorce, scandals within the church, how they were handled and the modern understanding of freedom. Other responses argued for the timelessness of Paul's teaching and how Christianity provided a bulwark against secular morality. The most successful responses were those where critical analysis was clearly evident and quite a number of different points were made from the case studies being referred to. In these answers, the candidates developed a diversity of arguments.
- Q2 (a)** This was a very popular question and prompted a large number of responses. Most responses were very good. The most successful responses answered all aspects of the task, providing not only a very good level of knowledge of 1Cor 12-14, but also providing a high level of understanding and specific analysis of the nature and use of spiritual gifts, quoting liberally from the text and scholarship. Some responses saw it as a comparison between tongues and prophesy. A number of responses left out Paul's teaching on 'love'. The weakest responses were narrative driven and often lacked accuracy.
- (b)** This question was well handled. Candidates were able to refer to a wide variety of evidence from at least two of Paul's Letters, the most popular being Corinthians and Galatians. Many responses were able to defend the claim and referred specifically to issues within the texts where Paul addresses his audience as a father figure who would correct disobedient children e.g. over the issues of sexual immorality or reverting back to the old ways of the Jewish law. Some responses were able to see possible counterclaims in Paul's attempts to be a teacher on issues such as marriage and church worship. Some answers were able to develop a diversity of arguments. The strongest responses were those where there was clear critical thinking and development of arguments. Weaker responses tended to misunderstand the question, did not use a variety of Letters to root their answer, offered few arguments, did not offer a balance of arguments and were repetitious or lacked development.

- Q3 (a)** This question was not popular. There were a variety of levels of response and often a degree of generality and lack of familiarity with the text in the least successful responses. For some responses, the main focus of their answer was the 'household code' and this limited their ability to access the full range of marks. The most successful responses clearly addressed the task and were specific in their selection of material from this new study. In particular, candidates skillfully dealt with explaining the complexity of the theology of Ephesians on Christian living.
- (b)** Candidates were well prepared for this question and coped very well with it. These responses were well informed and therefore offered a diversity of arguments. Many argued that Paul's teaching may seem outdated at times and at others has ongoing relevance. The very best responses also addressed the comparison with the relevance of Paul's teaching then and now. In most cases, candidates referred to contemporary examples to develop their arguments. Consideration was given to family relationships, living with Christ as a model and Paul's teaching on masters and slaves was skillfully related to modern day employer/employee relationships. Some answers were very thoughtful and well sustained. Less successful responses were not well informed and therefore, found the task challenging. These same answers were often brief, basic or there was a shallow development.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** This new task provided a variety of responses. Less successful responses made no reference to scripture from beyond the specification. Some did not mention their other area of study. Some responses made links to their other area of study that were not relevant, for example, the role of women linked with the Paschal controversy in the Celtic Church. Some gave excellent responses with clear and relevant links to their other area of study, referring to relevant aspects of human experience, rooting their response in scripture and directly addressing the inevitability of religious controversy.
- (b)** Many answers offered a focused and critical response to the question. The task encouraged candidates to explore whether in comparison to secular morality, religious morality was outdated. In most responses there was a real attempt to engage with the question and to offer a critical analysis. Some candidates gave many examples of how religious morality is outdated but were less successful in supporting another side of the argument with relevant examples. Candidates had been well prepared with historical and contemporary cases of human experience which they were able to draw on. Some of the examples used were attitudes to homosexuality and the Asher's Bakery case, women in the church, the recent Irish abortion referendum and the impact of child abuse by church leaders. The majority of candidates tried to make good use of other aspects of human experience to defend their arguments. The most successful responses were those where critical analysis was clearly evident and there was a diversity of arguments. The least successful responses simply listed human experience case studies, with minimal critical analysis.

Assessment Unit A2 3 Themes in the Old Testament

Most candidates appeared to find the questions accessible and in general produced answers relevant to the tasks set. It may be noted that as a rule appropriate time was devoted to (a) and (b) parts of questions, in line with the mark weighting. Question 2 was most popular, followed by Question 1, then Question 3. There was substantial evidence to suggest that changes to the synoptic task (Question 4) had been understood and candidates had been prepared to answer it. Overall, the paper provided a successful platform for all candidates to respond positively to the tasks set, while also allowing more able candidates to differentiate themselves.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** It was encouraging to observe that all candidates were able to identify compassionate aspects of the character of God as presented in the Old Testament. Many approached the task through the concept of the creedal statement, successfully tracing how God is envisaged as a figure of compassion in a variety of related texts explicating the core characteristics of God. In this process, stronger answers paid greater attention to judgmental aspects of God's character, thereby creating more balanced answers. Many candidates also explored God's concern for the marginalized, while some clearly understood the significance of Hosea 11, vv.1-11 in making the case for a God of compassion.
- (b)** Many candidates were well prepared to discuss how God is understood as a warrior, supporting their responses with arguments, including God's particular relationship with Israel, and how Israel was vulnerable in its historical context, needing the protection of God. In addition, candidates were able to deploy the concepts of herem and holy war in their answers. Better answers differentiated themselves by the quality of how they assessed that a violent God is no longer acceptable in the modern world, providing a range of reasons for this and a variety of examples related to it.
- Q2 (a)** All candidates displayed a level of knowledge and understanding about the call of Jeremiah, with many focusing on how he was tasked with uprooting/tearing down, as well as building/planting, in addition to the symbolism of the almond tree and the boiling pot. Fuller responses were able to present Jeremiah as prophet modelled on Moses, drawing out points of comparison between the call narratives, and placing Jeremiah's call in the broader context of his prophetic activity. No-one made the point that because Jeremiah was a Mosaic prophet he was opposed to the temple and the Davidic theology supporting it.
- (b)** The most popular method of addressing this task was to identify criticisms Jeremiah made of his society, before using these as a springboard for exploring their relevance and connection to a modern context. Taking this approach, Jeremiah's condemnation of temple worship and exploitation of the marginalized featured prominently. In addition, the theologically perceived eternal significance of the new covenant was referred to regularly. Stronger, more sophisticated responses differentiated themselves by their level of critical awareness, complexity and nuance.
- Q3 (a)** In answering this question, candidates demonstrated considerable evidence of having been taught the symbolic actions of Ezekiel, along with an awareness of their meaning. Stronger responses included a wider range of examples, including how Ezekiel created a model of a siege, lay on his right and left side for a period of time, cooked siege rations over human excrement, and variously distributed his hair after he had shaved it off. Less successful answers contained fewer or less relevant examples and showed a more limited understanding of what the symbolic actions signified.

- (b)** Most candidates clearly knew aspects of Ezekiel’s message of judgment, with many referencing his condemnation of the leaders of Israel (Ezek. 34), and the narrative concerning the death of his wife in support of their arguments. It was also well understood that Ezekiel was not only a prophet of judgment, as indicated by discussion of the concept of the new heart of flesh, the story of the dry bones, and the vision of the restored temple in the context of a renewed creation. Less developed responses tended to focus on generalized discussion of judgment and hope, whereas more developed answers included detailed discussion and balanced arguments.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** Responses to this task suggested that candidates had been competently prepared for the synoptic question, with most making a relevant link to another unit of study, and some developing it in very interesting and imaginative ways. In many instances, initial exploration of the relationship between sin and alienation was undertaken on the basis of a Biblical text (usually the Fall narrative in Genesis), before the discussion progressed to understandings of sin rooted in the thinking of Augustine, Luther and Calvin. Catholic teaching and practice also featured in addressing the task.
- (b)** A variety of approaches was taken to this task, many of which incorporated an understanding of secularization and the move away from moral absolutes in arguments supporting the view that the concept of sin is no longer relevant for many in society. The counter-argument was also regularly made that sin remains an important issue because religious belief still has a considerable following, both globally and locally. Stronger responses explored the nuances in the question, including how: the church has often acted hypocritically; different world religions deal with sin; there is still a strong sense of morality in individuals and society, irrespective of whether the term sin is used or not; and the concept of sin has changed to include structural dimensions, such as in environmental sin. All answers referred to other aspects of human experience.

Assessment Unit A2 4

Themes in the Early Christian Church and the Church Today

This was the first year for examining the new specification at A2 level. The view of the examining team was that most candidates were able to make a good or very good attempt at meeting the demands of the paper set. However, a minority of candidates found the paper challenging and were less successful. It appears that the majority of centres had prepared candidates well for the new mark weightings for AO1 and AO2. It is also apparent that the quality of critical evaluation has improved in many cases, and this reflects the hard work done by many centres. With regards to (a) parts of questions, it is essential that candidates target the narrower focus of the topic and address it in the limited time available. In Section A there was an even distribution of questions chosen by candidates. The new format for the Synoptic Assessment appears more challenging for some but also more manageable for others and it has resulted in a wider variety of answers than before.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was a well answered question for the most part. Candidates of all abilities were able to select two main features of Montanism such as eschatology, the Holy Spirit or asceticism, and explain these in good detail. Very few candidates wrote general essays on the heresy. Many responses highlighted how the chosen feature of Montanism differed from orthodoxy. This showed clearer understanding of the heresy and added to the quality of the answer. Added sophistication was brought to some answers with appropriate use of accurate quotations. Biographical details regarding Montanus were only of value if they were linked specifically to a feature of his heresy.
- (b)** Many candidates began their answer by defining ‘heresy’ and ‘schism’ and this was probably a useful starting point. However, there was sometimes a lack of awareness of the arguments to support or disprove the stated view. This prevented some answers from achieving top band scores. The higher scoring responses included a full range of points for both sides of the argument, such as, for example, the differing reactions within the early Church and how some branches of the Church today might regard Montanism. It was clear that some centres had looked at this in considerable detail. A minority appeared confused about the difference between heresy and schism, and this resulted in a limited or basic response.
- Q2 (a)** Responses to this question varied considerably. Some failed to identify Cyprian’s writing ‘On the Unity of the Catholic Church’ and appeared to have limited knowledge of his views. Top scoring responses often set the context for his writings i.e. the schisms after the Decian persecution, and then dealt with a full range of relevant information such as the importance and equality of all the bishops, bishops as the ‘glue’ and apostolic succession. Reference was often made to Cyprian’s illustrations of the sun and its rays, or the tree and its branches. Use of relevant quotations indicated sound knowledge of Cyprian’s views. Candidates should avoid the inclusion of unnecessary biographical details about Cyprian’s conversion, his rise to position of bishop and going into hiding during the Decian persecution. In some cases, this made up a page of the essay offered, and so candidates were taking away from the time needed to focus on the task.
- (b)** The focus of this question was missed entirely by some candidates who wrote, occasionally at length, about the problem of the lapsed. Such answers were almost entirely knowledge based and thus achieved a low band score. More successful responses referred to Cyprian’s attitude towards the lapsed and what lessons could be learned from this. Top scoring answers compared Cyprian’s time with ‘now’ and suggested possible scenarios where his writing may or may not be relevant. They looked at a range of points and included relevant examples of human experience to support these.
- Q3 (a)** This question was answered in a variety of equally valid ways. Some candidates focused on different forms of leadership and various problems which arise from each form. Other candidates considered current/ongoing controversial issues in relation to religious leadership such as ordination of women, women bishops, ordination of homosexuals or scandals involving leadership. Higher scoring responses presented relevant evidence and sought to give a balanced answer. In addition, they often concluded by referring to other issues which could perhaps be regarded as more central, for example, the challenge of science or the rise of secularisation. In some cases, candidates made other issues the focus of their answer and so failed to address the statement fully.

- (b)** Responses which failed to focus on C.S. Lewis could not achieve top band scores. The best answers were aware of the methods used by him in defending the faith and identified the positive aspects of his work. However, candidates also highlighted the limits of his work in relation to our secular age. There were some excellent critiques of his work which referred to the views of other scholars including Alister McGrath. Some candidates digressed from C.S. Lewis and made secularisation the emphasis of their answer. Other candidates also wrote about other apologists such as McGrath or Rahner.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** This task elicited a wide range of responses. Some candidates struggled with the statement and found it difficult to use non-taught course material to present a case. In some answers, candidates put their 'link' first but this was not always successful as they often did not return to material relevant to the A2 4 synoptic theme. Better responses used a variety of historical examples to support or disprove the statement and also included a link which was fitting and relevant. In some cases, the link was lacking in development. Top scoring responses fully addressed the task using non-taught course material and developed the link in an appropriate way.
- (b)** Responses to this task included a wide range of other aspects of human experience. The best responses gave clear evidence both to support and counter the stated view. These included, for example, reference to the role of different Churches in Nazi Germany, during the time of apartheid in South Africa, during the civil rights movement in USA, the influence of religion in the peace process in Northern Ireland and the more recent vote in relation to the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland. Surprisingly, there was a small number of candidates who struggled with the idea of 'conscience'. It is important that candidates avoid retelling historical events but instead use their sound knowledge of these to critically address the task.

Assessment Unit A2 5

Themes in the Celtic Church, Reformation and Post-Reformation Church

The feedback from the examining team was that the candidates made a very good effort to meet the assessment demands of the new Specification in this unit. Over all, the candidates performed very well in the paper and evidently had adjusted easily to the new AO1 and AO2 mark weightings. Clearly, centres had prepared their candidates very well, in terms of an effective approach to AO1 and AO2 tasks. Indeed, the lesser mark weighting for the AO1 task seemed to facilitate the production of concise responses which were tightly focused on the question asked. This in turn ensured that many candidates could access the range of marks for the AO1 task and manage their time well. There was also a perceived improvement in the quality of the critical assessment responses offered by candidates. As with AO1, a similarly valiant effort was made by candidates to focus on the question asked. There did not appear to be any issue with the management of time for most candidates. Question 1 was undoubtedly the most popular question; Question 2 was slightly more popular than Question 3. That said, there were an encouraging number of candidates who tackled Question 3 on the paper, given that it addressed an area which is new to this Specification. All in all, there was a fairly balanced number of responses across all three questions in Section A, which was very encouraging.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** Nearly all candidates responded to this question. Most candidates dealt with the question very effectively. Some candidates tended to describe the contents of the Book of the Angel with limited discussion on whether it provided the basis for the claims. More effective responses discussed other evidence and texts which formed or contributed to the basis of Armagh's claims to archiepiscopal authority. Very strong responses dealt with the Book of the Angel, additional evidence and texts, as well as offering a discussion on the tactics employed by the church of Armagh to promote its position. They also tended to discuss the reliability of the Book of the Angel and other relevant texts and evidence.
- (b)** Most candidates critically assessed the importance of religious authority today quite effectively. Many could assess the impact of a wide range of variables and issues on the importance of religious authority today. Even when this was done very well, a significant number did not address the importance of religious authority in the Celtic church. In some cases, where this was included, candidates relied on a retelling of events at the Synod of Whitby, in a narrative fashion. Better candidates addressed the importance of religious authority in both the Celtic church and today and were very selective of specific evidence which supported their argument about the importance of religious authority both in the Celtic church and today. These responses were insightful rather than descriptive.
- Q2 (a)** The responses to this question were generally good. Most candidates discussed the missionary contribution of Colmcille, before moving on to others such as Aidan and Colman. The best responses avoided narrative descriptions of the life on the missionary and instead discussed specific achievements and contribution. However, some candidates only referred to Colmcille and offered discussion on his early life before departure to Iona, which was of limited relevance to the question. A few candidates confused Colmcille and Columbanus, while some discussed missionary outreach on the Continent rather than Northern Britain.
- (b)** This question elicited some very good responses. There were a variety of approaches taken to responding to this question. The best responses critically assessed the motives of the Celtic peregrini or, at times, the main aims of some individual peregrini, such as Columbanus. These candidates then went on to critically assess the challenges and/or the focus on missionary aims today, for example the shortage of clergy, the challenge of secularism, reverse mission, inculturation. A small number of less effective responses offered description of the careers of peregrini with little critical assessment. There were a small number of candidates who focused only on missionary aims of the Celtic Church or the missionary aims of the church today but not both, as was required by the question.
- Q3 (a)** A significant number of candidates attempted this question and the quality of responses varied considerably. A significant number offered a general discussion on Vatican II, including its purpose, changes to liturgy and church architecture, instead of organisation. Some of these responses hit on some aspects of the question by default, because of their awareness of greater lay participation in worship. Other candidates included discussion on Vatican II's emphasis on ecumenism and outreach to other world religions but did not address the nature of church organisation. However, there were some high-quality responses. Typically, these candidates referred to the church as a people of God, decentralisation, devolvement of power to local churches, collegiality, the Curia and the role of the laity. In general, there was limited awareness of scholarly debate about how Vatican II dealt with church organisation.

- (b)** Most candidates addressed this task well. Some candidates did deal effectively with the statement and evaluated whether change has always been welcome and effective. Some of these discussed the need for change in the church today. However, they did not critically assess the claim in terms of the Celtic Church and the Protestant Reformation. Other less effective responses relied on describing the events of the Protestant Reformation and, for example, the Synod of Whitby. These responses did not address the statement. More successful responses critically assessed the statement in terms of the Protestant Reformation, discussing how Luther's theses were handled by the Church, the split in the church, religious wars after the Reformation and the benefits of diversity in the church. They also assessed how welcome and essential change was in the Celtic church wherein they referred to the Paschal Controversy, abbatial government, episcopal and monastic structure and the conservative nature of the Celtic church. Some responses of this nature were highly successful.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** Most candidates addressed the task reasonably well. Some candidates offered more than two reasons why religious believers have a duty to prevent conflict. In some responses a reason was contained in the connection to another unit of study, for example, the Synoptic Gospel and Jesus' teaching on non-retaliation. Less effective responses discussed examples of religious believers preventing conflict rather than the reasons they felt a duty to do so. A few candidates discussed the role of religion in both causing and preventing conflict rather than reasons believers have a duty to prevent it. A very small minority of responses did not reference a link to another unit of study, but the strongest candidate responses did this in a very integrated way.
- (b)** This task was generally very well answered. There were some very good quality responses to this question. These candidates addressed both the issue of whether religious faith has been matched by high levels of morality and evaluated whether religious faith and morality are inseparable. A few very sophisticated responses evaluated the complexity of the relationship between morality and religious faith, but these were the exception rather than the rule. Nearly all candidates supported their arguments with reference to a range of other aspects of human experience. Some responses were more limited in that they addressed only the idea of the match between strong faith and high levels of morality. In very few instances candidates produced narrative descriptions of the moral or immoral actions of religious believers, for example, Mother Teresa, clerical abuse scandals. This type of response to this question was in the minority.

Assessment Unit A2 6

Islam in a Contemporary Context

The majority of candidates were able to select two questions from Section A and answer the Synoptic Assessment question in Section B. Most candidates managed their time well and there was a noticeable improvement in the quality of the AO2 responses. In Section A all three of the questions were attempted although some questions were more popular than others. It was clear that candidates were well prepared for the examination and the questions were accessible. Each question allowed candidates to respond at their own level. In preparing candidates for examinations it might be helpful for them to understand that it is the overall quality of their answers that is significant and not the quantity. In relation to critical analysis it is expected that candidates will offer a balanced argument or a diversity of response as it is A2 standard.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was a popular question. There were some comprehensive answers where candidates were able to focus their response immediately on the task of explaining what the Qur'an teaches about angels. A small number of candidates were able to make specific reference to or quote from Surahs. The most successful answers were those where explanatory comments were added throughout. These may have related to the significance of angels in Islamic theology and revelation, or points of interest such as not having free will but the possible contradiction with the refusal of Shaytan to bow to Adam. This served to distinguish the strongest responses. Many responses made good use of scholarship to demonstrate their understanding. Some responses struggled when it came to discussing specific Surahs, or in offering additional comments, or in demonstrating adequate factual knowledge. Some responses gave some time to the topic of Angels but went on to give as much time to prophets which was not required. If this was made relevant to angels some credit could be given. Weaker responses demonstrated a very general or basic level of knowledge, or lacked analytical comments.
- (b)** This question was well handled. Candidates were able to refer to a wide variety of evidence from the Five Articles of Faith in order to evaluate whether or not Allah is only presented as being merciful. Many responses were able to defend this claim and referred to Allah's qualities found in the 99 names, Allah's willingness to communicate with humanity through angels, prophets, the Qur'an and Allah's willingness to forgive before judging and sending people to Hell. Some responses were able to see possible counterclaims in the existence and horror of Hell and the difficulties presented by predestination. Some answers were able to develop a diversity of arguments. The strongest responses were those where there was clear critical thinking and development of arguments. Weaker responses tended to misunderstand the question, did not use a variety of the Articles of Faith to root their answer, offered few arguments, did not offer a balance of arguments, were repetitious or lacked development.
- Q2 (a)** This was a popular question. Comprehensive responses showed detailed knowledge of the distinctive features of Shia Islam such as the Hidden Imam, the implications of this theologically on how Allah, Muhammad, and the Qur'an are understood, the adjustments to the Pillars, and the additional festivals. The strongest responses also offered analysis and explanatory comments. It was clear that some responses were based in scholarship and were well informed. Weaker responses tended to outline the history of the Sunni/Shia split with little reference to distinctive features, demonstrated a very general, confused or basic knowledge. These responses may have lacked explanatory comments which are essential.
- (b)** Candidates responded in different ways to the quotation in this question. Many responses focused on the first part of the question and traced the Sunni/Shia split from Muhammad's death until the Battle of Karbala. In some responses there was also a clear element of critical analysis but in some it was largely factual information which was being presented. A number of responses focused on the division caused by Muhammad's death and also considered the violence which occurred in Battles such as the Riddah Wars, the Battle of the Camel, the Battle of Siffin, the Battle of Karbala and its annual commemoration. A smaller number of responses interpreted the question to mean the contribution of Muhammad's leadership and his legacy and considered division, bitterness, violence and his overall legacy. In order to offer a diverse interpretation some responses considered other arguments such as, the impact of the leadership of

the four caliphs, issues to do with wealth and ambition. Some responses offered a sophisticated analysis while others offered a shallow or repetitive evaluation.

- Q3 (a)** This was a popular question. There were a number of approaches taken to the quotation and task in this question. Most responses did refer back to all or some of the quotation to help to focus their answer. In the strongest responses, the candidates realised that they were being asked to 'present a case for' the claim in the quotation. Comprehensive answers offered a selection of evidence from Islamic teaching where men and women are treated with equality, respect and equal status. These responses tended to be well informed by the Qur'an and scholarship, which was impressive. In some responses there was a balancing of arguments both for and against the claim and in some the responses were entirely against the claim. As this was an AO1 task, this was not required. Less successful responses were very brief focusing on one or two aspects of Islamic teaching, were general, or did not demonstrate understanding. The level of detail and explanation served to distinguish between responses.
- (b)** This question produced some very good evaluations. Some responses offered a comprehensive analysis of the question. The most successful answers were able to give consideration to traditional and more progressive Islamic views on abortion and assisted conception and use this to offer a critical analysis of whether or not Islam respects women in a profound way. Some were able to balance information and arguments very successfully. The strongest responses were those where there was clear critical thinking, balance and development of arguments. Some responses simply described Islamic views without fully utilising this material to make critical points. In some cases there was a serious imbalance with abortion dominating or assisted conception was not considered at all. Weaker responses tended to find it difficult to offer counter arguments, offered very few arguments, were repetitive or lacked development.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** There were some comprehensive and impressive answers to this question. Most responses were able to focus on the theme of the question and were able to focus on reformation, change and challenge which was encouraging. It was clear that candidates had been well prepared given the variety of human experience which they were drawing on. Many candidates did restrict themselves to one example, as required by the question, while others referred to a number of examples. The most successful responses were those which made a meaningful link between their material and their other area of study. Less successful answers tended to make a connection which was artificial or was not relevant to the theme/question, or merely set their material and the area of study side by side with little or no explanation of the connection. Some answers were also offering material from the Islamic taught course but this is not required.
- (b)** Many answers offered a focused and critical response to the question which was intended to get candidates to explore the contribution of religion to conflict, both positive and negative. In most responses there was a real attempt to engage with the question and to offer a critical analysis. Candidates had been well prepared with historical and contemporary examples of human experience which they were able to draw on. Some of the examples used were attitudes to homosexuality and the Asher's Bakery case, women in the church, the impact of child abuse by church leaders, violence in the name of religion, Corrymeela, love and forgiveness at the centre of religious faith. The majority of candidates tried to make good use of other aspects of human experience to defend their arguments. The most successful responses were those where critical analysis

was clearly evident and human experience was used to develop a diversity of arguments. Some answers simply listed human experience case studies, with minimal critical analysis. Some candidates referred back to the Islamic taught course, which is not required.

Assessment Unit A2 7 Global Ethics

The clear majority of candidates were able to answer two questions and complete their Synoptic Assessment in the time permitted. It was evident that most candidates were alert to the new mark weightings and so split their time accordingly, allowing for more substantial AO2 responses. These AO2 tasks were in the main well attempted and tended to be stronger than the AO1 response. It was apparent that only the stronger candidates dealt specifically with the set task as they were alert to nuances in questions. Others tended to give broader responses on the general topic rather than fine tuning their answers to meet the specific requirements of the question.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was a very popular question with candidates despite it representing a new area of study for teachers and students. Most candidates were able to cope quite competently with the set task with many of them displaying familiarity with both the Free Will and Determinist positions. Many structured their response around the contribution of key thinkers though quite a number tended towards determinist contributors. While candidates were clearly comfortable articulating the respective Free Will and Determinist standpoints they could invariably have been more effective in dealing with the specific task, that is, how Free Will is incompatible with Determinism. It was only the stronger candidates who made a clear effort to show how the two positions can be incompatible or not. These same candidates were familiar with key terms met in this topic such as libertarianism, incompatibilist and compatibilist and thus, soft determinism.
- (b)** A number of candidates appeared unsure of what was meant by moral responsibility with some interpreting it to mean our moral responsibility towards others, thus neglecting the requirement to consider the determinist viewpoint and the issue of moral accountability. Most candidates however were tuned in to the focus of the question and so were able to critically assess the issue of moral responsibility in terms of the determinist perspective. Most were able to offer a balanced argument here. The strongest responses were able to relate the idea that if the determinist view is accepted and Free Will is undermined then so is the concept of moral responsibility, as a determined action cannot be worthy of praise or blame. Many candidates used examples from human experience to illuminate their discussion, for example, the Mary Bell and Jamie Bulger cases. Some candidates unfortunately repeated material from Part (a) and thus fell foul of the double credit rule.
- Q2 (a)** This question was also a popular choice with most responding positively to the task. Most candidates were able to pick up on the nuance in the set task. The most successful responses had a clear focus on how the issue of birth control can be seen as essential for human well being and progress making reference to issues such as: women being entitled to the same reproductive freedom as men, the idea that birth control can liberate women in developing countries from a purely child bearing role, its role in the alleviation of poverty and birth control being advocated as a prophylactic to counter HIV/AIDS. The strongest candidates were clearly alert to this examination paper being concerned with issues in Global Ethics and so addressed the set question rather than a general response on the morality of birth control.

- (b)** Responses to this part were varied with some candidates giving a broad answer on the nature and development of human rights while others addressed human rights violations. As such many missed the explicit reference to “multi-cultural” in the question. It was only the stronger candidates who picked up on this element and so they were able to refer to the idea of human rights as a product of western values and for example, how the issue of gender equality is disputed by a range of African and Islamic societies. Many also referred to how non-western traditions need to be appreciated in their own right. Some candidates were able to make good use of cultural practices which would be seen as contrary to human rights such as FGM, forced marriage and honour killings.
- Q3 (a)** The majority of responses were able to some extent demonstrate how utilitarianism relates to capital punishment though the most successful responses were those that dealt with the actual question – how the utilitarian can defend the use of capital punishment. The stronger responses were able to refer to the notions of protection and deterrence as typical of the utilitarian justification. However, few candidates were able to relate the notion of retribution and how the argument from deterrence is the lynch pin of the utilitarian position. Very few candidates showed an awareness of the specific views of Bentham and Mill which would be expected at this level of study. The more limited responses were those that produced a standard essay on the ethics of capital punishment.
- (b)** There was a mixed response to this task from those who could not make the connection between Just War Theory and capital punishment to those candidates who could readily see the connection and could identify how a similar rationale underpins both. These latter candidates were able to identify similar principles that could be used to underpin both, for example, self-defence, legitimate authority, protection of the innocent and demonstrate some creativity in ways which both could be contrary to one another, for example, how unlike Just War Theory there is no diplomacy involved in the death sentence. Other candidates tended to struggle with this task with some just highlighting the criteria associated with Just War without relating it to the issue of the death penalty.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** There was a wide range of response to this question with a wide range of quality as well. While most candidates were familiar with the topic of conscience, a significant number could have gone about their answer in a much more effective manner. Some candidates appeared to experience some difficulty in maintaining a focus on either a religious or secular perspective as required by the question. These candidates tended to impart both religious and secular views. The more astute candidates either focussed on one view, for example, Aquinas or Freud with some looking at the religious view of conscience as the “voice of God” and highlighting religious figures who espoused this view. This was an acceptable approach to take. The establishment of the link with the other unit of study met with varying degrees of success. While some of the linkage was cogent, there were those who were unable to make a link or offered a fleeting link or presented a link that was very contrived. In some cases the link just came across as an add on. The more successful responses were able to marry the link well into their answer.
- (b)** This task elicited some very good answers and in many cases was the strongest AO2 response for candidates. Most candidates were able to provide a range of relevant examples to support their arguments on the effectiveness of conscience. On the one hand they tended to refer to conscientious objectors like Muhammad

Ali or Desmond Doss while figures like Hitler and Josef Fritzl were used to bolster the counter argument. Most candidates were able to use their examples to illuminate their assessment though very few candidates actually dealt with the issue of conflicted conscience. Most presented a black and white view regarding whether conscience should be obeyed or not.

Assessment Unit A2 8 Themes in the Philosophy of Religion

There was a small increase in the candidates sitting this module. The majority of candidates answered the three questions within the time allocated and there was little, if any evidence, of rubric violation. The questions seemed accessible to all candidates with differentiation primarily seen in the depth and/or breadth of responses. Most candidates successfully tailored their responses to meet the new mark weightings. In some cases, candidates opted to answer their AO2 task before their AO1 task. There were some outstanding responses to this module, with a number of candidates handling the lengthier critical assessment tasks in particular with sophistication and flair, citing diverse and very relevant evidence and scholarship to sustain their arguments.

Section A

- Q1 (a)** This was the most popular question. Top band candidates responded directly to the task set namely the challenges that the theory of evolution posed for the Creation Narratives in Genesis. In some cases, candidates described the theory of evolution and/or Darwin's journey rather than addressing the challenges his theory posed. Many candidates distinguished between the literalist/Creationist approach and the liberal/accommodationist approach to the Genesis Narratives as part of their responses. Common challenges cited included perceived conflict regarding the timeframe and dating of creation/evolution and the status and role of God and humanity within both Genesis and Darwin's theory of evolution. Most candidates referenced the Huxley Wilberforce debate within their responses. Popular scholars include Behe, Dawkins, Darwin, Temple and/or Kingsley. While some candidates opted to simply explore the immediate impact of Darwin's theory, others opted to look at the subsequent development of the clash between Darwinian theory and a Christian view of Creation. Both approaches to the task were valid. In some cases, candidates discussed the impact of the Big Bang theory however, it should be noted that the question centred on the challenges evolution posed.
- (b)** There were some exceptionally strong responses to this debate task. The majority of candidates were well prepared to explore issue of the compatibility or otherwise between scientific and world views. Most candidates argued that both ideologies could be both seen as irreconcilable particularly citing the views of atheistic scientists including Neo Darwinists such as Dawkins and the views of Logical Positivists such as Ayers who argued that religious language was meaningless before counter challenging that in fact, the two world views could and indeed should work together. In some cases, candidates assumed that all science is inevitably atheistic and confrontational in tone, however this is not necessarily always the case. Einstein, Wittgenstein and/or Teilhard de Chardin in particular were cited as seeking to reconcile both science and religion. A number of candidates identified Intelligent Design and Behe's views in particular as examples of a scientific world view seeking to reconcile religion and science while other candidates chose to differ, both approaches showed independent thought and were valid approaches to the task set. Some candidates opted to

explore in depth the conflict regarding human origins and creation, while others opted to widen their remit to explore a range of controversies ranging from the impact of Galileo's discoveries to more recent conflicts including differing medical and religious views concerning sexuality.

- Q2 (a)** This was a less popular question and there was some clear differentiation in levels of response. While some candidates explored in depth both Kant's Categorical Imperative and the place of God within Kant's teachings, other responses were much less developed with candidates at times demonstrating somewhat limited knowledge of the Categorical Imperative and/or Kant's moral teachings in general. The majority of candidates noted that while Kant's Categorical Imperative did not explicitly reference the presence of a Christian deity nonetheless such a deontological theory of morality logically suggested the need for moral absolutes/commands and as Owens noted, this led in turn the need for a 'Commander'. A number of candidates explored the need for the existence of an afterlife to ensure just moral rewards (the goal of happiness) could be fulfilled. Some candidates also explored the two types of imperatives Kant identified and/or his distinction between logical and practical reasoning within their answers. Relevant examples to underline the importance of universal directives, such as the importance of keeping a promise or not opting for abortion were including in a number of answers.
- (b)** In many cases candidates' responses to the AO2 task matched or surpassed the level of their AO1 answers. There were some outstanding answers and it was clear that candidates were able to explore a number of diverse scholarly views concerning the need for a deity to impose moral restrictions. Many candidates identified the source of the quotation from Dostoyevsky's 'The Brothers Karamazov' with a number also referencing Nietzsche's famous declaration that 'God is dead'. Scholars popularly cited included Kierkegaard, Rabelais and Aquinas, with Nietzsche's call to reject Christian 'slave morality' being particularly popular. Many candidates noted that the stated claim could be interpreted both positively and/or negatively. Many candidates argued that to imply that Humanists and/or atheists had lesser morality than theists was offensive. Examples of religious leaders' moral failures and/or church scandals was cited within a number of responses to argue the point that theists had no monopoly on moral righteousness. Top band responses were identifiable by the quality and precision of the evidence cited to sustain the candidates' critical argument.
- Q3 (a)** This was a popular question. Top band responses honed into the views of materialism concerning life after death. In some cases, candidates also explored dualism as part of their responses and, while some reference to dualism as a contrasting theory was relevant, it must be remembered that the focus of the question was on materialism's rejection of life after death as illogical. In some cases, candidates offered rather limited information on the views of materialism and struggled to sustain their answers. Most candidates opted to explore the views of Ryle, Ayer and Flew within their responses. Very relevant analogies such as Ryle's 'ghost in the machine', his 'team spirit' or Flew's 'dead survivors' were cited in a number of answers, however it was clear that some answers demonstrated a greater understanding of such analogies than others. Many candidates defined the term 'death' and/or distinguished between hard and soft materialism within their answers.
- (b)** Top band responses demonstrated a sure understanding of Hick's replica theory and were able to offer very strong analysis of this theory, notably as to whether it in fact supported Christian teaching on resurrection. Weaker band responses demonstrated a more limited grasp of Hick's theory and at times opted simply

to evaluate whether resurrection could be supported. A number of candidates identified three stages within Hick's replica theory and explored scholarly reaction to this theory, notably Davies' criticism of the concept of replicas. The problems of continuity and identity were referenced within many responses. A number of candidates noted that not all theists supported resurrection and not all Christians supported bodily resurrection. Scriptural support for Hick's teaching including St Paul's teaching on resurrection was popular. Some candidates noted that atheism's rejection of a deity or Divine power over life and death would make Hick's theory invalid for many.

Section B

- Q4 (a)** A large number of candidates opted to respond to Question 4 as their first or second answer within this module. There was considerable differentiation in levels of response to the synoptic task. Some candidates explored one shared principle in considerable depth and made a coherent and developed connection to their second area of study. In some cases, however, candidates struggled to identify a shared principle in any real depth, and in a very small number of cases failed to draw any synoptic link. At times, rather general statements were made such as both Humanists and Christians share the Golden Rule without providing further development of response or evidence to support their claims. Some candidates opted to explore the views of Christian Humanism and others atheistic Humanism within their responses, both approaches were equally valid. The majority of candidates clearly identified the second unit of study from which they drew their link and this was a good strategy. Popular shared principles included a common drive to care for humanity, the value and dignity of human beings, and stewardship of care for the environment. In some cases, candidates explored a range of principles without linking them under a unified strand/principle as the question demanded.
- (b)** In the main candidates answers to the AO2 strand matched or surpassed their answers to the AO1 task. It was good to see evidence that more time was allocated to the debate task since more marks are available for this part of the question. Top band responses homed in on the task wording 'the secular world...natural part of being human', often exploring in depth the implications of such a claim. In some cases, candidates struggled to identify secular states or simply explored the growth of secularisation without directly tackling the nuances of the stated claim. While there was diversity in the examples cited within this response, many candidates referenced France's ban on the burqa in public areas and the repressive nature of the governments of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. It was refreshing to see candidates widen their range of examples to include those drawn from contemporary news, media and drama. Popular scholars cited within answers included Jung, Freud, Marx, Hitchens and Dawkins, notably Dawkins' view that religious education was a form of indoctrination and that religion was by no means a natural part of what it means to be human. Many candidates were able to identify a wide range of benefits that religious belief provided for the community and the individual, with some candidates noting that Humanism can be defined as a belief system. A number of candidates used relevant statistics to support their argument.

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