

GCE



**Chief Examiner's Report**  
**Religious Studies**

Summer Series 2019





## Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of this specification for the Summer 2019 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 section on our website at [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk).



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# GCE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## Chief Examiner's Report

### Introduction

The quality of response offered by candidates throughout all units was very encouraging with the vast majority presenting evenly balanced answers between the (a) and (b) parts of questions. The quality of critical assessment offered for AO2 tasks continues to impress examiners. The most successful candidates answered questions directly and comprehensively, invariably picking up on nuances in the set tasks. In terms of advice for learners for improvement, the following could be noted:

- Read the task carefully, identifying its key elements and target them specifically in the answer;
- Providing introductions and conclusions (especially when there is nothing new to be said) are an absolute luxury and can detract from the content of the answer offered, bearing in mind the time constraint of 20 minutes;
- For Section B AO2 tasks, be more alert to what is taught course and what is not taught course. Always try to ensure the examples relating to other aspects of human experience are used to bolster the assessment offered and do not become an end in themselves; and
- Try to ensure handwriting is as legible as possible as examiners are not responsible for second guessing what a candidate may or may not be trying to communicate.

AS Religious Studies continues to have a strong candidature with the vast majority of candidates (close to 50%) now studying ethics.

## Assessment Unit AS 1      An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

### Overview

Question 1 in Section A and Question 3 in Section B proved the most popular questions on the paper. Candidates accessed the complete range of bands and there was no indication that candidates had inadequate time to complete their answers. Overall, candidates appeared to be well prepared for the topics on the paper and many candidates achieved highly. Where candidates did not access the top bands, it was in the main, through failure to fully address the question set. This was particularly evident in AO2 answers where candidates listed arguments or made statements but did not offer any analysis.

Question 1 responses produced the greatest span of marks with some candidates simply recalling narrative of the Infancy account, while others were able to draw out the theological intent of annunciation. Question 2 exhibited some excellent and astute answers on the topic of salvation history in Luke's Gospel. Question 3 was comprehensively answered by many students and most students achieved highly on the AO1 part of the question. Question 4 displayed the greatest range of differentiation in the answers.

- Q1 (a)** This was the most popular question in Section A of the paper. Most candidates were able to provide good knowledge of the annunciation of the birth of Jesus. However, some candidates digressed into the birth story or paralleled the births of John the Baptist and Jesus thereby overlooking the focus of the question. Several answers tended to be narrative driven simply providing a general account of the infancy overall. A minor number of candidates offered the angels visitation and canticle to the shepherds as an annunciation story. This was accepted with some demonstrating good understanding of how this account linked with Luke's theme of universalism. Those candidates accessing higher bands showed very good understanding of the theological significance of the annunciation. They displayed very good understanding of key themes such as the fulfilment of prophecy, women, joy, the Holy Spirit, universalism and salvation. Many Band 5 answers provided comprehensive understanding of the theological significance of the annunciation by paralleling it to the annunciation to Joseph in Matthew.
- (b)** Most candidates answered this question very competently and appeared to be well prepared to evaluate the claim. Many candidates were able to give reasons why John was not important when compared to Jesus such as his role as forerunner and the nature of his conception. Those candidates who were also able to proffer a counterclaim such as, without John the Baptist prophecy could not be fulfilled, were able to access higher bands as they provided critical analysis in their response. Some candidates did not meaningfully address the demands of the question, instead providing parallel narratives of the annunciation and birth of Jesus and John the Baptist. These responses were unable to achieve the higher bands as they were largely unable to construct a balanced argument.
- Q2 (a)** This question produced some excellent and comprehensive answers on the role of Jesus in relation to Luke's understanding of salvation history. Most candidates who attempted this question had a firm understanding of salvation history and were able to apply their understanding to the issue of the role it plays in understanding Luke's presentation of Jesus. However, the focus of the question, the role of Jesus, was the discriminating factor between candidates accessing higher bands. Most candidates were able to display their knowledge of salvation history and were able to reference the work of either Conzelmann or Fitzmyer. Those accessing higher bands were able to apply this knowledge to the role of Jesus with textual examples. More limited answers tended to focus on commentary relating to the role of Jesus as a Saviour in general and showed limited understanding of salvation history or the theory behind it.
- (b)** Candidates appeared prepared and well able to debate the view that Luke was both a historian and theologian. Most candidates provided a balanced response and explored Luke's role as a historian and evangelist. A good range of evidence from Luke and other external sources was often used to support the point of view and this elucidated some quality answers which accessed Band 5 with ease. Some candidates interchangeably used historian and evangelist to produce a more general answer relating to Luke's purpose in writing.
- Q3 (a)** This question elicited a wide variety of responses and was the most popular question in Section B. Many candidates knew the arguments surrounding the early, intermediate and late date of Luke's Gospel and showed wide-ranging and coherent understanding of why scholars had proposed these dates. There were many responses that were clearly Band 5 and exhibited knowledgeable analysis of the stated proposals. However, some candidates could state a point of knowledge which linked with a date but didn't expand to show understanding, application or link to the problematic nature of dating the Gospel. Therefore, they did not have enough discussion to show that they fully understood the reasoning behind the proposal. Some candidates mixed up the martyrdom of Peter and Paul and the Gospel and Acts in relation to the question of dating.

- (b)** Candidates who accessed the higher bands demonstrated excellent critical analysis offering a counterclaim to the statement. Band 5 answers provided very good critical analysis with links to other aspects of human experience. Many candidates gave excellent responses explaining how the demands of Christian discipleship are still very evident today including the renunciation of wealth and family, sacrifice, forgiveness and love of enemies. Some candidates simply listed human experience examples and failed to analyse them or link them to the question. Therefore, in lower band answers, examples of other aspects of human experience, were vague and very generalised and some candidates lost focus on the issue of Christian discipleship and referred to other faiths.
- Q4 (a)** This answer elucidated some very good responses displaying quality understanding of the theological purpose of healing miracles in Luke's Gospel. Higher band answers structured their response around the purposes of miracle and used concise exegesis of the miracle to support their point such as; how they are signs of the Kingdom of God, the prerequisite of faith, how they reveal Jesus' identity and demonstrate his power and authority. Most candidates included the Centurion's Servant and the Ten Lepers with some choosing the Widow at Nain. Lower band responses tended to be narrative driven and often merely retold miracles mentioning nature miracles or miracles outside the specification. The purpose of miracle was often missed within the answer.
- (b)** This question generated some very good and diverse answers. Higher band responses provided excellent analysis of the statement which were often backed up with very good examples with many citing the views of Hume and Dawkins when discussing the claim. Some candidates struggled with the phrase pre-scientific age, with those accessing lower bands interpreting the question as arguments for and against miracles happening today which gave the question a different angle and therefore some answers were not pertinent to the question as a result.

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

### Overview

Overall, the question paper was well received and all candidates were able to answer to the best of their abilities, allowing them the opportunity to access the full range of marks. The tasks gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and depth of understanding. The vast majority of candidates were able to answer the relevant questions, one from Section A and one from Section B. Most candidates managed to complete the paper in the allocated time. All four of the questions were attempted although Question 4 was the least popular. Overall, the paper posed no serious issues and candidates coped well with the wording of the questions and the time given. Centres should be aware of the tendency of some candidates to write all that they know about an area of content without engaging directly with the task. This often leads to a narrative driven response and limits access to the full range of marks.

- Q1 (a)** This was a very popular question and answers were of a reasonable standard. Most candidates gave an account of the events in the upper room and concluded with the conversion of 3000 people. The most successful responses addressed the task by referring to the key words from the question. They provided evidence of both the immediate significance for the first followers who experienced Pentecost and a broader significance that acknowledged the birth of the church and the foundations for the work that would fulfill the commission in Acts 1:8. A number of candidates were able to articulate their knowledge and understanding fluently. They were able to add detail, for example, Hewitt's opinion on the possible interpretations of glossolalia. Some candidates showed very good understanding of the events of Pentecost but struggled to identify how these events were significant for the first followers of Jesus. Many successful responses attempted to summarise or at least analyse the speech given by Peter. The least successful responses were unable to offer any development beyond the gift of tongues, leaving comments on the speech and consequences limited or absent. They often did not comment on the broader significance of Pentecost. These responses sometimes left out key information that occurred at Pentecost and showed no evidence of the significance of these events.
- (b)** In general, the responses dealt with the different characteristics in Acts and most were able to provide examples from Acts to support their argument. Few responses attempted to make any distinction between preaching and proclamation, clearly identifying an understanding of 'kerygma'. Most responses were all able to identify the preaching offered by key characters such as Stephen, Peter and Paul. Some responses were able to refer to a broad range of evidence in order to evaluate whether or not preaching and proclamation are the main characteristics of Acts. More successful responses were able to compare a variety of other characteristics such as universalism or the role of the Holy Spirit. The least successful responses were unbalanced with varying degrees of analysis often giving only a very vague response to the question by outlining some of the characteristics of Acts but did not mention preaching and proclamation at all. Some confused characteristics with purpose and many identified miracles as a characteristic, without any connection to preaching. Many responses attempted to discuss in general the characteristics of Acts but did not concentrate on preaching and proclamation.

- Q2 (a)** This was a popular question. In general the responses were based on the content of Stephen's speech and were of a good standard. The most successful answers were able to tailor their knowledge and understanding of Stephen's Speech to the question. They provided quality evidence with clear examination of whether Stephen's speech was a condemnation of Judaism as well as outlining the content of Stephen's speech in very good detail. These answers used the nuances in the speech to address the question directly several times. For example, responses made reference to the treatment of Joseph by his brothers and the failure of the Jews to obey God's commands given to Moses. Some candidates argued that Stephen did not condemn the Jewish people directly but merely their mistakes. The least successful responses offered a narrative account of some of the speech without comment on the context or with little reference to the question or too much analysis at the expense of the contextual detail of the speech.
- (b)** In general, responses were able to focus on the benefits and outcomes of Stephen's martyrdom for the spread of the Church's mission, offering articulate and coherent argument. Many responses were able to recognise what was meant by the universal mission of the church and identify how the martyrdom of Stephen was central to its fulfillment but not in isolation. Some candidates recognised the speech as a break from Judaism and the Temple. They also recognised the role of the Holy Spirit behind any work for the universal mission of the church. The most successful responses were able to contrast the contribution of Stephen's martyrdom with that of other key people and events such as Philip in Samaria and also his encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch, Peter at Pentecost and his meeting with Cornelius and Paul's missionary travels. In doing so they provided relevant textual evidence and argument. Less developed responses tended to be one-sided, less informed and offered a limited pool of evidence. The least successful responses acknowledged that the death of Stephen signaled the spread of the church but were unable to offer much development beyond that.
- Q3 (a)** In general, responses were structured and displayed a relatively high degree of knowledge and understanding of Paul's conversion experience. The most successful responses were able to give detailed textual analysis as well as consider the other strand "the importance" of the conversion. The most successful responses recognised the dramatic and significant nature of Paul's conversion, and were able to comment on how he fled Damascus and met the other apostles as well as his missionary journeys. Some responses offered accurate use of scholars to support their discussion. A number of candidates offered a narrative-driven account of the conversion and the role of Ananias but provided no analysis as to why this event was important. The most successful responses outlined from the text Paul's conversion and discussed how this was important in the immediate and the long term. They focused on the question, engaged with the text and provided quality knowledge and understanding clearly explained and with some sophistication. The least successful responses did not develop the account beyond Saul's sight being restored. Reference to 'importance' was limited. Often these responses were either driven by too much narrative, or by too much analysis at the expense of the contextual narrative of Paul's conversion.

- (b)** In general, responses offered a discussion of what mission was and examples of missionaries. While some good human experience was offered it was not always integrated successfully to the question. The most successful responses understood the term “crucial” and were able to analyse the effectiveness of mission. Many of these responses were able to offer two sides to the debate that articulated the difficulties of a secular world. Some responses argued that this state of affairs was exactly what made mission crucial. Some offered greater insight, suggesting that mission could happen at home or abroad, in particular presenting a good discussion of the personal mission’s local clergy might undertake. Many responses attempted to give an account of missionary activity with varying degrees of application to the question. Some brought in points from other faiths and modern day technology, particularly social media, in relation to mission. Some candidates argued one side only or used limited examples of the spread of religious belief today such as their RE teacher, grandparent, themselves going to church. The least successful responses were those who merely told stories offering biographical accounts of missionary lives with limited reference to the question or listing different types of mission without addressing the question properly.
- Q4 (a)** This question provided the widest variation in responses. The most successful responses recognised the authorship debate and were able to discuss the internal and external evidence with reference to the ‘we’ passages. Very good responses had a good focus on the question making textual reference to the “we” passages and discussing their importance for an insight into the authorship of Acts. The best responses were able to identify the difficulty in identifying the author and also discussed the value of the “we” passages. Many attempted a general argument that Luke was the author. Some offered a broad background question including authorship and date as well as sources. A small number of the less successful responses answered the question solely from the point of view of the authorship of Acts and showed little engagement with the task. The least successful responses were unable to provide the appropriate evidence to substantiate their claims and so became repetitive. Some of these least successful responses displayed little knowledge of the “we” passages in relation to authorship.
- (b)** The most successful responses were able to explain the relevance of the evidence they provided to answer the question with many candidates ably considering the challenge for the Christian Church suggested by the task. A variety of good examples from other aspects of human experience was offered including secularism and science. The most successful responses wrote comprehensively around the issue of defending religious belief and practice in a hostile world with critical analysis. Some candidates appeared to break the question into parts – how religious belief could be defended and how the world was hostile to religious belief. This limited their critical discussion as they often struggled to make connections between the two. A few responses were able to acknowledge the importance religion might have in the modern world, for example, through the environmental awareness of Pope Francis. Many successful responses explored both the positive and negative aspects of the challenge of defending religious belief and offered good supporting critical argument. A minority of responses offered only one point of view. A few responses attempted to address the task with examples of human experience that did not relate to the question.

## Assessment Unit AS 3

## An Introduction to Themes in the Old Testament

### Overview

Candidates found the questions accessible for the most part and produced answers relevant to the tasks set, reflective of various levels of understanding and sophistication. Question 4 was the most popular task addressed, followed by questions 1 and 2, then Question 3. It should be noted that there was evidence that the AO2 tasks were successfully tackled, with candidates demonstrating greater competence and scoring higher marks than in the AO1 part of the question, in some cases. Overall, the paper provided a good platform for candidates to respond positively to the questions asked, while also creating the opportunity for differentiation.

- Q1 (a)** There was considerable evidence that all candidates were aware of the importance of the theme of “justice and righteousness” in the Book of Amos, with a significant number meaningfully relating it to the oracles against the nations. Many were able to outline, with relevant examples, the social injustices prevalent in the northern kingdom of Israel, and the terms of judgment deployed by Amos to indicate that punishment was unavoidable. More successful answers specifically explored the use of the phrase “justice and righteousness” in Amos, correctly placed it within the wider prophetic corpus, and discussed it in the context of Amos 5:24.
- (b)** On the basis of the Isaiah 19:25 quotation, all candidates were able to acknowledge and explore ways God was concerned with other nations as well as Israel. More detailed answers discussed the wider context of Isaiah 19 and the significance of the phrases “my people” and “my handiwork” as applied to Egypt and Assyria respectively, before making connections to Isaiah 56:1-8 and Amos 9:7-15. A number of responses indicated the way God was concerned to punish both Israel and other nations, often with reference to Amos 1:2-2:3. Answers that included a relevant counter-argument most regularly incorporated appropriate knowledge of the Mosaic Covenant as the reason for God’s primary concern for Israel. The strongest responses utilized the exclusivist covenant renewal of Ezra-Nehemiah in support of their arguments.
- Q2 (a)** Virtually all candidates demonstrated a degree of knowledge about why Israel wanted a king and the warning of Samuel that a king would be acquisitive, paving the way for an unjust monarchical system to emerge. Fuller answers contained relevant details of 1st Samuel 8:1-22 and appropriate aspects of the narrative that led to the division of the kingdom. When dealing with the concept of “an ideal king”, some focused exclusively on Saul, David, Solomon and other kings in 1st Samuel, whereas the most developed responses included pertinent conceptual material from Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and Psalm 72.
- Q2 (b)** Although this may have been perceived as a challenging task, a significant number of candidates were drawn to attempt it and the majority demonstrated a level of understanding of the issues involved, rooted in the unconditional promises made by Nathan to David that constituted the Davidic Covenant. A minority adopted an almost completely narrative driven approach, without significantly dealing with the implications of the fall of Jerusalem for core aspects of the Davidic Covenant. Indeed, a few confused the division of the kingdom into Judah and Israel with the Exile. However, many grasped that the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE challenged the continuing validity of the unconditional promises made in the Davidic Covenant. The most sophisticated responses understood the link between the fall of Jerusalem, the apparent end of the Davidic Covenant and the emergence of messianic thought in the Old Testament.

- Q3 (a)** This question was accessible and straightforward but attracted the fewest responses. All of those who engaged with the task showed considerable knowledge and understanding of the Elisha narratives, with the stories of the Shunamite woman and Naaman the leprous Syrian general being particularly popular as the basis for formulating answers. While the majority of responses accurately presented Elisha as the successor to Elijah, only the most astute were able to articulate that at the deepest level the Elijah-Elisha cycle of stories probed whether power was located in the royal establishment or at the prophetic margins. The most successful answers integrated their explanations and arguments with the theme of bringing signs of hope and life in a harsh world, and often included discussion of 2nd Kings 6:8-23.
- (b)** Approaching the task in a variety of ways, all candidates responded with a degree of success and relevance. Some tended to accept the premise of the question and did not develop significant counter-arguments. More balanced and nuanced answers: demonstrated that the Bible is ambivalent to monarchy; understood the concept of a constitutional monarchy, with a greater degree of democratic accountability; and explored different forms of government, such as a republic, which are equally viable from a religious point of view in the modern world.
- Q4 (a)** Examining the importance of the Mosaic Covenant in the life of ancient Israel was a popular task. To a considerable degree, candidates demonstrated broad knowledge of the bilateral nature of the covenant, along with how it was instituted in the Sinai theophany, following liberation from oppression in Egypt. Many responses included details of the decalogue, but the more informed indicated how the Mosaic Covenant was central to all aspects of life, worship and society. While many answers correctly argued for the primacy of the Mosaic Covenant over the range of covenants operative in ancient Israel, the most sophisticated included discussion of the importance of the Mosaic Covenant through history, including examples of this and how it was periodically renewed.
- (b)** Informed discussion of varying quality formed the basis of answers to this task. Many candidates took a comparative approach to similarities and differences in relation to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, before exploring Buddhism, the Hindu faith and the implications of polytheism. As might be expected, some reached the conclusion that all religions are possible paths to God, while others took a more exclusivist position, often on biblical or doctrinal grounds. In general, more successful responses reflected a higher level of sophistication, critical awareness, insight and balance in approach.

## Assessment Unit AS 4

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

### Overview

For the most part candidates were well prepared for the examination. The questions gave students of varying abilities the opportunity to indicate the level of knowledge and understanding they had acquired during their course. The quality of Part (b) responses is most encouraging and Centres deserve credit for the hard work in helping pupils develop these essential evaluative skills. In Section A, Questions 1 and 2 were equally popular. However, in Section B very few candidates attempted Question 4. The vast majority of candidates had sufficient time to select and complete two responses although a significant minority omitted a part of a question. There was a very small number of candidates who broke the rubric, adopting a 'pick and mix' attitude towards the questions. It is worth highlighting to candidates the importance of legible handwriting. Although examiners do make every effort to make sense of what is presented, they are not responsible for second guessing what a candidate may or may not be trying to communicate. As expected, the most successful candidates were those who addressed the set tasks comprehensively.

- Q1 (a)** This was a popular question and the majority of candidates were familiar with Diocletian's persecution. The most successful candidates applied that knowledge to the question and, using a full range of evidence, indicated how his persecution was 'different from other persecutions'. The best responses also usually referred to similarities between Diocletian and Decius. Some candidates were aware of a good range of differences but did not link these to named earlier emperors. Less successful responses wrote a general essay detailing the cause and course of the persecution in question. This limited them from achieving top band scores. The least successful responses got Diocletian confused with other emperors.
- (b)** The majority of candidates were able to present a balanced response to the question. Those who had written about the cause and course of the persecution in Part (a) were at risk of repetition in Part (b) and thus, double credit cannot be given. The most successful responses provided a full range of reasons why the failure was inevitable but also highlighted that it may well have been successful due to the long term impact of the persecution on the Church in terms of schisms. The least successful responses were usually brief and lacking in critical assessment.
- Q2 (a)** Many candidates attempted this question and the most successful responses focused on a wide range of aspects which made Constantine sympathetic to Christianity. However, some candidates wrote about his rise to power – often very accurately and in detail – but missed the focus of the question. This again highlights the need for candidates to carefully read and target the actual task. Surprisingly, some candidates made no reference to his conversion which was the most significant event in making him sympathetic to Christianity. The least successful responses simply described his conversion briefly without reference to the stated task.
- (b)** This question was generally well answered by the majority of candidates who were able to offer a wide range of evidence for both 'religious' and 'political' reasons. Some candidates focused on whether or not Constantine's conversion was genuine. Although the content of responses to both is similar, candidates are advised to use the wording of the question in their answer. This helps ensure they are dealing with the set task. It was gratifying to see reference to scholarly debate on the issue including the contribution of Jacob Burckhardt's writings.

- Q3 (a)** This was the most popular question in Section B and the standard of answering varied considerably. The best responses indicated a sound and detailed knowledge of the two identified sources – the New Testament and the Didache. Some responses omitted the New Testament element entirely and focused on the Didache and all other sources listed in the Specification. Regarding the New Testament, the best responses referred to the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s writings. In writing about the Didache, some responses confused its content with later sources.
- (b)** Many candidates produced very good responses to this question – including those who had been less successful in Part (a). A wide range of evidence was offered both to support and to counter the stated claim. Reference to other aspects of human experience often included discussion of the beliefs and practice of various traditions/denominations and how these did or did not support the claim. Alternatively, or as well as this, candidates were able to suggest and explore a wide range of other activities which are regarded as more important aspects of faith. These included practical aspects of Christian living, worship and prayer. A considerable number of candidates included good discussion on whether or not baptism was more important than Eucharist.
- Q4 (a)** Very few candidates attempted this question and of those who did, some answered it very well. The best responses had a sound knowledge of Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho and were able to apply that knowledge to the prefacing remark. They highlighted how his comments could be perceived as hostile but also the fact that Justin valued Judaism as Christianity had its roots in it and was the fulfillment of all that is good in Judaism. It was gratifying to see the use of accurate quotations from the Dialogue. Weaker responses dealt with Justin’s other writings such as his Apology.
- (b)** This task was generally well answered and is probably why some candidates attempted the question. The best responses included a range of theological issues which continue to challenge religious leaders. These included, for example, reference to new atheism, science and same sex relationships. The best responses were able to cite specific debates within denominations or individual religious leaders and their views on issues. Some good responses also referred to modern day heresies and how these challenge religious leaders today. It is important that candidates, when referring to other aspects of human experience, write in specifics and not in generalities.

## Assessment Unit AS 5

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

### Overview

The question paper was successful in that it was accessible to candidates. There was clear evidence that questions differentiated well between candidates of different abilities. In Section A Question 1 was very popular with fewer candidates attempting Question 2. In Section B Question 3 was only slightly more popular than Question 4. There was limited evidence of time management issues among the candidature. Most responses were evenly balanced between Parts (a) and (b) of questions. In AO1 tasks it was clear that most candidates understood the focus of the questions and were well prepared to address the tasks set. In the AO2 tasks many candidates engaged in high quality critical analysis and in the section B AO2 task included a range of relevant examples of other aspects of human experience. A minority of candidates did not however engage in sufficient critical analysis in AO2 tasks. Some of these responses lacked a focus on the question set.

- Q1 (a)** This was a highly popular question. Most candidates successfully engaged with the task by exploring the portrait of Patrick that emerges from the Confessio. Stronger responses were able to focus on Patrick's character traits with textual references from the Confessio used by way of evidence to support the points made. Some of the strongest responses explored a range of character traits outlining the complexity of Patrick's character as evidenced through the Confessio. A minority of less successful responses focussed on merely outlining the contents from the Confessio or giving a general outline of the themes of the Confessio. A very small number of candidates outlined the portrait of Patrick that emerges from the Letter to Coroticus.
- (b)** A majority of candidates showed a clear insight into the arrival of Christianity into Ireland before Patrick. Stronger responses successfully evaluated a range of evidence and critically analysed the information such evidence provides on the arrival of Christianity into Ireland. Less successful responses failed to engage in critical analysis, instead merely outlining in a general manner some of the ways Christianity may have arrived in Ireland. These responses were characterised by a lack of argument and difficulty in exploring other points of view.
- Q2 (a)** This was not a popular option with the candidature. Overall, the question elicited some high quality responses from those who attempted it. Most candidates were able to successfully examine the reasons why Muirchú may have written the Life of Patrick. Stronger responses were able to focus on the political and religious circumstances during the time when the Life of Patrick was written and discuss Muirchú's reasons for writing in that context. Some quality responses used textual references from the Life to successfully evidence points made on political circumstances, such as the rise of the Uí Néill, and religious circumstances, such as the promotion of Armagh. A small number of candidates merely outlined the features of hagiography generally or offered stories from the Life of Patrick.
- (b)** The majority of candidates were able to examine why religious believers may have an interest in hagiography. Some less successful responses did not engage in critical analysis such as exploring why religious believers may not have an interest in hagiography or indeed the reasons why others, including historians, may read hagiography. More successful responses offered a critical analysis of why a range of different parties may be interested in hagiography with the most successful candidates outlining how these various interested parties may benefit from reading hagiographical works.

- Q3 (a)** This was a popular question with some excellent responses that focussed in detail on the reasons for the change from episcopal to monastic organisation in the Celtic Church. These high level responses outlined how the many unique circumstances in Ireland meant the episcopal system of organisation was less well suited to the Celtic Church when compared with the monastic system of organisation. Less successful responses discussed the reasons why monasticism was popular in a general sense. A minority of candidates chose to write about the features of monasticism.
- (b)** While most candidates were able to make some attempt at exploring the relationship between political and social developments and religious beliefs this question was not managed well by some candidates. Less successful responses did not make sufficient reference to other aspects of human experience as a way to evidence arguments put forward. A small number of responses simply outlined recent controversial issues or events without necessarily addressing the focus of the question. Stronger responses engaged in critical analysis using other aspects of human experience to show different ways religious belief has adapted in light of social and political developments and times when religious belief cannot be changed regardless of such developments.
- Q4 (a)** There were some excellent responses that examined in detail how Celtic penitential practice was distinctive when compared to the wider Church at the time. These responses used textual references from Penitential texts to illustrate how the Celtic Church practice was distinctive. Less successful responses were unable to evidence the unique features of Celtic penitential practice offering only general points about sin and forgiveness in the Celtic Church. A minority of responses offered only background on the Penitential texts and their authors.
- (b)** In answering this question many candidates were able to offer a wide range of examples from other aspects of human experience. Stronger responses were able to maintain a focus on the statement in the question by critically analysing the claim that total forgiveness is idealistic but not impossible. A minority of candidates offered little analysis focusing instead on outlining stories where people offered forgiveness to another.

## Assessment Unit AS 6      An Introduction to Islam

### Overview

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 allocated. It was interesting and encouraging to see that candidates had divided their time equally in order to give time to the A02 task. 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.

- Q1 (a)** This was a fairly popular question. There were some comprehensive answers where candidates were able to focus their response on all aspects of the question and were able to select material relating to origins, Muhammad and caliphs as well as dealing with the more challenging aspect of the question which was to explain the ‘contribution’ of Muhammad and the caliphs. These responses demonstrated both detailed knowledge and understanding, which was often underpinned by scholarship. Weaker responses referred to Muhammad with little or no consideration of the role of the caliphs. Some responses did not attempt to address the question and deal with ‘contribution’. Some responses demonstrated a very basic, narrow or general knowledge.
- (b)** Some candidates were able to refer to a wide range of evidence in order to evaluate the importance of the Qur’an and also whether or not the problem with the Qur’an was one of interpretation. Most agreed with the statement and suggested reasons why the Qur’an is important to Muslims and also why interpreting the Qur’an can be challenging, for example, it is written in Arabic, it is an ancient document, the structure of the Qur’an, the significance of Sunnah and Hadith or the Law Schools. In some cases there was no attempt at a counter-argument or to look at the claim from a different perspective. 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, lacked development or became confused and treated the question as an ‘other aspects of human experience question’ and talked about problems related to interpreting the Bible.
- Q2 (a)** This was a popular question and in the main was handled well. Comprehensive responses were able to target all of the aspects of the question, for example, considering how an Imam ‘guides’ and ‘teaches’ the Muslim community. The most informed answers were able to illustrate their comments with clear examples and explanation. Some responses, however, found it challenging to offer detail and as a result the answers were a general description of the role of an Imam with little or no reference to the quotation or the two key words. The weaker responses tended to present knowledge in a partial way or did not offer any explanatory comments to demonstrate understanding. Some responses treated the question as an A02 task and offered a balancing of arguments. Perhaps it would be helpful to reinforce what the trigger ‘examine this statement’ means to learners.

- (b)** Some candidates were able to refer to a range of arguments in order 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 different ways in which a mosque is supportive to Muslims at all stages of life. Many candidates then looked at alternative or counter-arguments and considered other aspects of Islam which are supportive, for example, the Qur'an, the Sunnah and Hadith, the ummah, the family, faith in Allah, festivals, the Pillars. The strongest responses were those where there were clear, critical and developed arguments. Weaker responses tended to only offer descriptions of the mosque without making use of this material to write a critical analysis. Some answers offered a limited number of arguments, were one sided, were repetitious or lacked development.
- Q3 (a)** This was not a popular question. Comprehensive answers offered a detailed summary of both aspects of the question and considered both Muhammad's call and the persecution which followed. 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 why Muhammad's call and also the experience of persecution which he and his followers experienced became significant for the community as a whole. The most successful responses were able to offer accurate information and explanatory comments throughout. Some answers were quite general or did not refer to call, persecution and importance. Some answers simply outlined Muhammad's call or life. 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 candidates considered how religious experience could be valuable to a believer or how collective worship could be valuable. A number considered possible counter-claims to the statement, arguing that there can be limitations to the value of religious experience and collective worship or that both are valuable to believers. The majority of responses did try to draw arguments from other aspects of human experience, which was encouraging. However, there was a tendency to offer description rather than using material to produce a strong critical assessment. Some responses drew on Islamic material to answer the question, which was a pity. Weaker answers tended to only deal with religious experience or only with collective worship or only offered one side of the debate. 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 supported with examples from other aspects of 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 candidates handled it in different ways. The most successful responses were those which focused on the different aspects of the question, for example, the Shahadah itself and how the pillars are based on the beliefs stated there and express submission to Allah, gratitude to Allah, or imitate Muhammad. Comprehensive answers demonstrated both knowledge and understanding. Some answers showed knowledge of the Shahadah but did not relate it to the Pillars or made very brief or generalized comments about the Pillars. A number of responses did not address the quotation or did not address the Pillars. Some responses indicated that the candidates had interpreted the question trigger ('examine') as a critical analysis task and felt they had to balance arguments. As this was an A01 task, this was not required. The quality and sophistication of the responses did serve to distinguish between the answers offered.

- (b)** Candidates coped quite well with this question although some found it challenging as they were not certain what religious and moral duties were. The most successful answers were those where there was a consideration of the purpose and value of religious and moral duties for a life of faith. The strongest answers showed clear critical analysis which was supported by other aspects of human experience. In these responses the selection of relevant examples and the way in which they were used to address the question was particularly good. Most were able to offer a counter argument. 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. Weaker responses focused either on religious duties only or moral duties only. Some answers blended religious and moral duties together in a generalized way. There was a tendency to offer a considerable amount of knowledge and understanding rather than critical thinking. A number of responses were using the Islamic taught course material to answer the question, which should be discouraged. 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

### Overview

The vast majority of candidates were able to fulfil the examination rubric by selecting two questions, one from Section A and one from Section B, and were able to complete their answers within the allocated time. As with the previous examinations in 2017 and 2018 the candidates appeared to be adhering to the 4 X 20-minute rule for the completion of their test paper. Again, this discipline is to be highly commended as it is clearly affording candidates the opportunity to maximise their marks across the examination. All questions appeared to be equally accessible thus reinforcing how accessible the paper was for candidates. The paper was successful in allowing learners to respond to the questions posed yet effectively differentiating between candidates of differing abilities. The only tasks that appeared problematic were Questions 3 (b) and 4 (b) especially the former where a significant number of candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with Narrative Ethics despite it being listed specifically on the Specification. While all tasks in the examination paper elicited Band 5 awards there were those who struggled to get out of Bands 1 and 2 largely due to complete misreading of the task, for example, confusing “situation ethics” with “utilitarianism” for Question 3 (a) or confusing “conception” with “contraception” for Question 4 (a). The more accomplished candidates not only knew their subject matter but also targeted the set question and so, their answers were a joy to read.

- Q1 (a)** This question was generally well answered. Most candidates were aware of the Primary Precepts and were able to focus on them throughout the entirety of their response. These same candidates were often able to develop their answers with clarification of how the secondary precepts are linked to the Primary Precepts, providing some exemplification as well. The most effective responses were those that focused on the set question “the importance of the Primary Precepts” by demonstrating a sound understanding of how the Primary Precepts are foundational to Natural Moral Law. Other candidates gave an overview of Natural Moral Law and mentioned the precepts in passing though were not always consistent on explaining them or were not aware of all of them or confused them with other features of this ethical theory. The least successful responses tended to offer a very generalised overview of the theory with marked paucity in quality and quantity.

- (b)** In general, this task was reasonably well answered. Most responses offered comparison of deontological and teleological ethics drawing on taught course material with relevant exemplification. The most successful responses linked the notion of moral absolutes beyond, for example, the Decalogue and appraised scholarly opinion along with the idea of moral duty in moral decision making. Here, real and meaningful critical assessment was evident throughout with reference to the secular age and how moral absolutes/commands are no longer seen as relevant. These same candidates were familiar with the views of Richard Dawkins and Peter Singer as well as relevant faith perspectives with some referring to the thinking of Soren Kierkegaard and how religious faith can involve the teleological suspension of the ethical. Some candidates opted to look at the Decalogue (with some simply detailing the commandments) and attempted to connect these to modern laws while others used the Beatitudes and other material from the Sermon on the Mount though with varying degrees of success. The least successful answers were unfamiliar with the concept of moral commands.
- Q2 (a)** A popular question, most candidates were able to make a very good attempt in explaining how the Sanctity of Life teaching informs the arguments against euthanasia. The most successful answers were clearly well informed on the Sanctity of Life principle, especially its biblical underpinning, and were able to articulate clearly how it can be used to oppose euthanasia. These same candidates did not lose sight of the stated task. A small number of candidates were familiar with strong and weak versions of the principle. Less successful responses tended to write all they knew about euthanasia with some treating the task evaluatively in identifying arguments for and against. These candidates appeared to miss the word against in the task. Learners should be encouraged to read any task carefully ensuring they pick up on key words and strive to consistently adhere to the set task throughout their answer.
- (b)** Generally, candidates made concerted effort to address the set task though the quality of answer varied considerably especially in the degree of sophistication that was evident. The most successful responses focused specifically on the actual question with meaningful assessment of the doctor/patient relationship with these same candidates aware of the Hippocratic Oath, the slippery slope argument, the issue of misdiagnosis, the example of Jack Kevorkian, the issue of sanctuary certificates in Holland and counterarguments such as personal autonomy and the right to a dignified death as well as how legalisation could possibly enhance the doctor/patient relationship. The more alert candidates were those who profiled fatally as this was a key word in the task. Other candidates tended to look only at arguments for and against euthanasia or provided a one-sided argument to highlight how euthanasia has undermined the doctor/patient relationship in Holland. What was particularly noteworthy about this task was the evidence from responses that candidates can see the relevance of their study for issues in Medical Ethics and this is beneficial for them, especially if they intend to pursue a career within the medical field.
- Q3 (a)** While the vast majority of candidates were very familiar with Situation Ethics (though some confused it with utilitarianism) there was a rather stark dichotomy in the quality of response offered. On the one hand there were those candidates who just wrote an essay on Situation Ethics invariably highlighting the importance of the love ethic while on the other hand the more successful answers were those that targeted the set task and were clearly familiar with the four working principles and the six fundamental principles yet addressing the prefacing quotation at the same time. These same candidates were able to highlight how the specific principles considered demonstrated how Situation Ethics puts the person at the centre of moral decision making. Some candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with the working and fundamental principles in this ethical theory.

- (b)** This task was the most poorly answered in the examination. A significant number of candidates appeared to be unaware of Narrative Ethics even though it is specifically listed in the Specification. In some cases, there were candidates who were performing at the highest standard throughout their test paper only to arrive at this point and had virtually nothing to say about Narrative Ethics or attempted to respond to the question by offering material that either took them back in again to other elements of their taught course (many attempted to give an overview of every type of ethic covered in their AS course) or bore no resemblance at all to the issue of Narrative Ethics. However, there were those candidates who were clearly well prepared for this examination and had left nothing to chance. These candidates were clearly familiar with Narrative Ethics and sought to articulate the case for Narrative Ethics against principlism in Medical Ethics with reference to the long-held principles as enunciated by Beauchamp and Childress. These same candidates were familiar with the stories of the Forgetful Mourner and/or Dax Cowart. Joan McCarthy's article on Principlism v Narrative Ethics (2003) might be of some assistance to learners here and can be accessed online. The study of Narrative Ethics reinforces the value of this course in ethics in preparing those learners who are interested in pursuing a career in a medically related field.
- Q4 (a)** In most cases this task was well managed. Candidates generally referred to IVF and surrogacy and attempted to explain how utilitarianism would support the case for assisted conception. The most successful responses drew on the utilitarian maxim, how utilitarianism is interested in the benefits for all involved, how the end justifies the means linked to specific examples with some utilizing Bentham's hedonic calculus and Mill's harm principle to augment their answer. As always, the more effective responses were those that sought to deal with the stated task. Other candidates treated the task evaluatively while there was no requirement to do so. This AO1 task was typical of any AO1 question i.e. the target skill was understanding and knowledge. In this instance it was inviting the candidate to identify the relevant understanding and knowledge acquired from the course study to support the case for assisted conception. Some candidates presented an answer on assisted conception with minimal reference to utilitarianism while the least successful responses were those that interpreted "conception" as contraception.
- (b)** In many cases this question was well attempted though there were those candidates, like those for Question 3 (b), who were utterly unaware of what is understood by the "public square." The most successful responses were well informed on the issue of the public square regarding faith and moral matters, engaged with the prefacing quotation and used a range of relevant examples from other aspects of human experience to reinforce their assessment such as the example of Martin Luther King, the issue of marriage equality, the issues of the rights of the unborn and the vulnerable in society. Weaker responses attempted to look at the role of religion in shaping morality rather than specifically looking at the public square. In some cases, candidates cited a litany of examples with minimal real and meaningful critical assessment. It is important that candidates are aware that the critical assessment demands expected for Questions 1 (b) and 2 (b) also apply in Section B of the examination paper. The use of examples from other aspects of human experience should be employed to illuminate the assessment offered.

## Assessment Unit AS 8

## An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

### Overview

There was a small increase in candidature for this unit. The questions were accessible to all, with differentiation being primarily seen in the depth and/or breadth of responses submitted. There were few if any rubric violations and the majority of candidates completed the four tasks with the allocated time. Many candidates very skilfully interwove the statements and quotations provided within their responses. It was good to see a very diverse and relevant range of examples and situations referenced in Section B AO2 questions, matching the requirement to refer to other aspects of human experience within these tasks. In a number of cases, candidates referenced some taught course material within these tasks even though they are required to stay clear from their taught course here. A number of candidates opted to answer their AO2 task before their AO1 task.

- Q1 (a)** This was the most popular question in Section A. Top band responses addressed the issue of reformulation directly within their responses, while weaker band responses simply detailed Aquinas' Three Ways without reference to the stated claim as the task demanded. Most candidates noted the roots of Aquinas' cosmological argument in the work of earlier Greek philosophers, including the work of Plato and/or Aristotle. The development of strands of Aquinas' Cosmological argument by subsequent scholars was identified in most candidate's responses. Popular references included Mackie's train analogy to develop Aquinas' rejection of infinite regression and Copleston's exploration of the notion of First Cause in his BBC debate with Russell. While the Kalam argument was cited in a number of responses, some candidates were unsure of the time frame of the argument. The original Kalam argument (as explored by scholars such as al-Shafi'i and al-Ghazali) predated Aquinas' argument while Craig's updating of the Kalam argument post-dated Aquinas. The majority of candidates opted to detail Aquinas' Three Ways within their responses, with varying degrees of accuracy and precision. A number of candidates explored the issue as to whether there was any significant reformulation of the Cosmological argument, noting that Aquinas' argument was the definitive one and subsequent scholarship simply expanded upon his work. Several candidates noted that the Kalam argument ran parallel to and was not influenced by Christian scholarship.
- (b)** In the main this task was particularly well handled. It was clear many candidates were familiar with the Cosmological argument and were confident about evaluating it. Popular critics cited included Kant and Hume, primarily arguing on empirical grounds. Russell's challenge to Copleston was also discussed within most responses. Some candidates compared the relative successes or otherwise of a posteriori and a priori proofs. Top band candidates successfully addressed the theistic counter argument, exploring the strengths of Aquinas' approach to verifying the existence of the God of classical theism. The difference between atheistic and theistic approaches to the cosmological argument was discussed by the majority of candidates. Very relevant scientific arguments were referenced to both support and deny the argument such as Kenny's challenge to the concept of the Unmoved Mover and growing evidence to support a first cause to the creation of the universe. There were some exceptionally strong responses to this task evidenced, with some candidates exploring, in some considerable depth, a range of evidence to sustain both sides of their debate.

- Q2 (a)** There were fewer responses to this question. There was some differentiation in levels of response to this task. Top band candidates successfully explored a range of Teresa’s writings concerning religious experiences. Weaker responses retold Teresa’s biography or summarised her mystical experience’s in general with lesser exploration of the main features of her writings as the question demanded. The “watered garden” and the “interior castle” were the most popular analogies explored. Teresa’s mystical experiences, including her experience of levitation and the transverberation of her heart, were commonly cited. Most candidates discussed Teresa’s teaching on prayer as the pathway to union with the Divine. Some candidates successfully interwove some of the primary features of mystical/religious experiences (as identified by Otto and/or James) with Teresa’s writings.
- (b)** As with the AO1 task there was some diversity in levels of response to this debate. While many candidates were able to explore the veracity, or otherwise, of religious experiences in general, not all drew the link to the issue of the existence of the Divine, with some candidates answering more by default than by design. Nonetheless, the majority of responses explored a number of scholarly challenges to the veracity of religious claims, with particular reference to the statement provided: - that such claims are based on personal and subjective experiences and thus less likely to be true. A number of candidates explored the truth claims of miracles in particular, and while miracles are one form of religious experience it should be noted that religious experiences include a range of experiences of the Divine. Many candidates explored atheism’s complete rejection of any form of religious claims, frequently citing Dawkins, Atkins and/ or Hitchens within their responses. Swinburne’s Principles of Testimony and Credulity were also referenced within a number of debates.
- Q3 (a)** In most cases this question was well handled, most candidates were able to explore the Christian view of miracles with many successfully drawing on the wording of the quotation within their responses. Some candidates referenced Biblical miracles and the centrality of the resurrection for Christianity in particular, while others focused more specifically on the diverse definition of what constitutes a miracle for theists/Christians. Most candidates explored the views of Aquinas (notably his 3 ranks of miracles), Swinburne and Wiles within their responses. Bultmann’s call to demythologise the New Testament was cited within a number of responses. In some cases candidates wrote rather lengthy atheistic criticism of miracles, for example, Hume’s critique of miracles and while some criticism was valid perhaps as a preface to Christian counterclaims, the primary focus of the question was on the Christian view of miracles. Many candidates noted that the Christian view encompassed a range of scholarly opinions and views.
- (b)** It is clear that candidates had explored a range of claimed and verified miracles and were able to provide a strong analysis of the validity of miraculous claims as evidenced within their responses. It was good to see very clear reference to other aspects of human experience within candidate’s debates. The 70 miracles the Catholic Church has attested to at Lourdes and examples of answered prayers were commonly referenced. Most candidates provided strong challenges to claimed miracles with many referencing the issue of religious bias in support of miracles and the placebo affect regarding claimed healings. There were some very sophisticated responses to this debate, with candidates able to draw on a diverse range of scholarly views and very relevant historical and contemporary examples to sustain their argument.

- Q4 (a)** This was a popular question. There were a number of approaches to this task - some candidates opted to briskly identify the problem the Free Will defence sought to address, before exploring the issue of free will as found within three theodicies, the Augustinian, the Irenaean and the Free Will defence per se. Other candidates opted to focus on Swinburne's Free Will defence, drawing in supporting scholarship such as that offered by Vardy and Hick. Both approaches were valid, as elements of the free will defence are found across a number of theodicies. Weaker band responses spent time exploring the Inconsistent Triad and the types of evil or simply detailing the Augustinian and /or Irenaean theodicies, without fully drawing out the free will defence component. Popular analogies including Vardy's use of the peasant girl and Swinburne's loving parent analogy. Most candidates referenced Hick's counterfactual hypothesis and his views concerning epistemic distance. A number of candidates critiqued Mackie's option of creating human beings who would be free only to choose the good, arguing that this is a denial of true freedom. There were some exceptionally strong responses to this task, with many candidates clearly well prepared to explore the Free Will defence.
- (b)** Top band candidates were able to explore how the existence of evil either led to the total rejection of the God of classical theism or to the presence of a malicious and malevolent deity. Many candidates quoted Stephen Fry's and Richard Dawkins' statements concerning childhood disease to support their view of a malevolent deity. Inequitable suffering was cited by many as revealing a capricious God. A number of candidates noted that the existence of evil was a greater challenge to monotheism than polytheism, with a number also noting that atheism could offer no simple solution to the existence of evil, while theism at least could offer eschatological hope. The Inconsistent Triad was explored by most candidates as was the Holocaust experience (and the views of Elie Wiesel in particular). Some very relevant examples of contemporary suffering were cited including the actions of ISIS, as an example of how religious belief can compound the issue of evil. Some candidates cited Dostoyevsky's and/or Camus' views on the issue of evil, however it must be noted that these scholars are part of their taught course and cannot be credited within this particular debate.

## Chief Examiner's Report

### Introduction

The quality of work at this level offered by candidates throughout all units was very encouraging with the vast majority completing their tasks within the time permitted. It appears that most candidates are continuing to spend around 15 minutes for their AO1 task and 25 minutes on their AO2. If any task suffered it was invariably Question 4 with some forfeiting their answer to Part (a) in order to get their answer to Part (b) completed. Examiners were also of the view that the quality of synoptic assessment in this series regressed from 2018. There were a number of examples where candidates were trying to make prepared answers fit questions. Some work still remains to be done on ensuring that the link with the other area of study is relevant (not contrived) and is integrated effectively into the answer. The quality of the answer to Question 4 often did not match that offered in Section A. The quality of critical assessment offered has definitely improved since the legacy examination. As always, the more successful candidates were those who dealt with the specific task and demonstrated a consistent ability to unpick tasks and to target precisely what the question was looking for in their answers. In terms of advice for learners for improvement, the following could be noted:

- Be alert to what the question triggers (the command words) mean especially the AO1 trigger "Present a case for" which is not an evaluation trigger, thus no counter argument is required in the answer;
- Provide introductions and conclusions (especially when there is nothing new to be said) are an absolute luxury bearing in mind the time constraints, especially that of the AO1 task (15 minutes);
- Try to ensure handwriting is as legible as possible as examiners are not responsible for second guessing what a candidate may or may not be trying to communicate;
- Try to ensure that the specific task is addressed for Question 4 (a) and that the link with the other area of study is as relevant and meaningful as possible; and
- It is more effective to work towards the link in the synoptic AO1 as it helps to achieve better synopticity in the answer.

The candidature for the subject remains strong with Global Ethics being the most popular unit.

## Assessment Unit A2 1 Themes in the Synoptic Gospels.

### Overview

Questions 1 and 2 were the most popular on the paper. The marks for these questions spanned all bands with some candidates achieving very highly, displaying comprehensive understanding and analysis throughout. Question 3 provided the most variance in marks. Where candidates attempted this question, they either answered it extremely competently or very poorly. Question 4 (a) was answered disappointingly by many candidates. There appears to have been a regression from the previous series with many candidates using perhaps a pre prepared answer which did not address the question. Many candidates did not mention evil and suffering in their answer. Candidates should be aware that it is essential to answer the question asked in order to access higher bands. Legibility of handwriting is also an important point of note as examiners cannot interpret what a candidate may mean, they can only mark what they see.

- Q1 (a)** This was a very popular question on the paper and in general candidates clearly knew and understood the key principles and methodology of narrative criticism. Those candidates achieving higher bands were able to exemplify the practice of narrative criticism through instances from the text such as describing the concept of U-shaped plot through the parable of the Forgiving Father in Luke's Gospel. Candidates who referenced the question and developed their understanding of how narrative criticism could contribute to an understanding of the Gospels achieved highly.
- (b)** Most candidates were able to proffer some debate of the statement. Many candidates were able to evaluate all four criticisms with scriptural references and therefore achieved highly. Those candidates who were able to debate the value of Biblical criticism as opposed to hindering understanding of the texts or challenging divine authority did very well. They displayed evaluation of various approaches to religious thoughts and concepts which was to be commended. Some candidates had little knowledge of the value of Biblical criticism or critiqued narrative criticism alone. These candidates struggled to move up the higher bands as evaluation was limited. Some candidates were also unable to access the higher bands as they fell into double credit, analysing the value of narrative criticism in Part (a) and then repeating this material verbatim in Part (b). However, overall this answer was answered in a well informed and analytical way.
- Q2 (a)** This question produced some excellent and erudite responses from candidates. Many candidates were able to provide some comprehensive exegesis of passages relating to Jesus' attitude to the poor concentrating on central issues such as the importance of building up treasures in heaven, equality of treatment and self-sacrifice. Some candidates simply provided narrative recall of scripture passages relating to wealth and poverty, but they were in the minority. Candidates taking this approach to answering were unable to access the higher bands as while knowledge was there, they lacked understanding. In general candidates were able to provide relevant evidence, examples and scholarship demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the question set.

- (b)** Candidates appeared well able to debate the statement that it is not possession of wealth but one's attitude to it that can cause problems in modern society. Those candidates who were able to provide convincing analysis and examples attained highly. Many candidates used the example of Bill and Melinda Gates as an example of modern philanthropy and positive use of wealth. There were some very insightful and interesting examples and responses given, including examination of prosperity theology, social media influencers and the increasingly consumerist mentality of modern society. Some candidates did not refer to the word "today" and focused instead on scriptural examples and therefore, did not address the question fully and were unable to access higher mark bands. This again emphasises the importance of reading the question fully and addressing all aspects of it.
- Q3 (a)** This question provided great separation between top and lower band answers. It was answered very well by many candidates who clearly knew the differences and similarities in the Synoptic Gospel accounts of the burial of Jesus. Many responses were clearly Band 5 and exhibited knowledgeable analysis of the burial of Jesus. These responses were able to explore the theological significance of the discrete details such as Luke's explanation of Jewish customs or Matthew's polemical concerns. However, some candidates attempted the question without fully knowing the differences between the burial accounts and therefore displayed limited knowledge and understanding. Some candidates gave brief narratives of the death of Jesus rather than the burial and appeared confused over the unique details of each evangelist.
- (b)** Band 5 answers provided excellent critical analysis and well informed arguments citing relevant scholarship. Many candidates gave quality responses explaining the various proposals for and against the truth of the empty tomb story. Some candidates provided exceptional debate with relevant scholarship such as Jenkins, Spong and Lapidé and were able to provide personal insight and independent thought. It was clear that some candidates were well prepared and had clear understanding of the task. Lower band answers were vague. Some candidates lost focus on the issue of the empty tomb altogether and concentrated on the debate for and against resurrection in general.
- Q4 (a)** There was a range of responses given to the synoptic question. Overall, the responses were disappointing as many candidates failed to address the question of evil and suffering. It appeared that many candidates had pre prepared an answer based on interpretation of religious texts and tried to make it fit the question. Many candidates provided no link with another unit of study or the link was not meaningful, relevant or connected to the question. Several responses included other examples of suffering and evil in the world but again did not answer the question set. It is imperative perhaps to remind candidates of the importance of answering the question, rooting their answer in scripture and making a valuable and pertinent link when answering Part (a) of the synoptic question. However, there were those candidates who answered this question competently using Genesis 3 or Job as an example of how religious texts have tried to address the problem of evil and suffering. They were then able to link that to their other area of study identifying connections such as free will and determinism, moral and sinful actions of religious leaders and the penitential texts.

- (b)** This question generated some very good answers. Those candidates accessing higher bands used an extensive range of relevant examples of other aspects of human experience such as Emil Frackenheim’s holocaust theology, atheistic views, in particular, the comments of Stephen Fry and a diverse range of examples of moral and natural suffering. Higher band responses were well informed and provided a balanced consideration of the view. Many candidates were able to provide competent reasons why suffering is a challenge for religious belief including the inconsistent triad as a basis for their debate. Lower band answers tended to focus more on the issue of forgiveness in relation to evil and suffering and personal insight was often limited or not fully developed.

## Assessment Unit A2 2      Themes in Selected Letters of St Paul

### Overview

Overall, the questions on the paper allowed the majority of candidates to adequately express that for which they had been prepared. In the main this was done to a good degree and there was ample evidence of excellence on behalf of a smaller number of candidates. The new specification continues to offer the challenge for candidates in the area of critical analysis. AO1 tasks showed that not all candidates were prepared for the depth of knowledge and understanding required and some drifted from the main quarry of the tasks. Candidates of differing abilities had the opportunity to respond positively to the questions. The new approach to Synoptic Assessment has not been clearly understood or embraced by some candidates and as a result there were some responses however, that struggled to deal with this task. Furthermore, there was evidence of learned responses that were expecting a particular slant to the AO1 task. This is not good practice and candidates are to be discouraged from this approach. They are directed to the synoptic guidance offered on the CCEA website for further clarification. Most candidates had ample time to complete the paper. Whilst all three of the questions were attempted, Question 3 was only attempted by a very small number of candidates. Centres should be aware that there continues to be some evidence of scholarly quotations being contrived by candidates for which they could not get credit.

- Q1 (a)** This was a popular question which elicited some very good responses. The most successful responses addressed the task by providing evidence of a high degree of knowledge and understanding of Paul’s teaching on marriage set in the cultural and theological context of the Corinthian church. In particular, they made reference to the imminent ‘parousia’, the ascetic/libertine issue and the licentiousness of pagan Corinth. These responses also provided scholarly analysis for clarification of Paul’s teaching in this area. They addressed most, if not all, of the areas outlined in the mark scheme. Many responses attempted to list Paul’s teachings to the various groups with little commentary. Some responses also focused on his teaching on sexual immorality. This provided some context but was not the main quarry of the task. Some less successful responses only addressed specific teaching on marriage, for example, his teaching on love between a husband and wife, the purpose of marriage, but did not address other such areas as divorce, widows and the unmarried. There was some confusion with Paul’s teaching on relationships and “the household code” in Ephesians.

- (b)** The majority of responses were aware of some of Paul's teaching on both marriage and immorality. The most successful responses made reference to specific examples of Paul's teachings and confidently linked these to today's world. They also looked clearly at both sides of the argument while including scholarly opinions. Other responses also used the veiling of women and disunity in Corinth as examples of immorality. Some responses were weighed heavily on one side of an argument, whilst some continued to use information from the 'household code' in Ephesians when highlighting that Paul's teaching was out of date. Many responses attempted to give a broad awareness of immorality focusing on the sexual sins of Corinth. The least successful responses didn't make any specific reference to Paul's teachings whilst attempting to highlight the value of what he said. Some just stated whether or not something was relevant without explaining their reasons, thus struggled to provide critical analysis.
- Q2 (a)** In general, the responses were of a good quality with candidates aware of the need to focus in on Chapters 1 and 2 of Galatians. The most successful responses dealt with all aspects of the question, establishing a context, Paul's immediate response in the Letter, his conversion, visits to Jerusalem and the rebuke of Peter. Scholarly analysis was clear and relevant. Many responses attempted to give an overview of the main aspects of Chapters 1 and 2 to varying degrees of success. Some less successful responses used evidence and examples from Chapter 3 and 4. Many responses attempted to only outline the defence rather than analyse it. Many candidates focused heavily on the Judaisers and the build up to Paul's defence and then did not detail enough that defence. The least successful responses didn't necessarily include all aspects of the question and focused more so on giving an overview of Galatians. There was little in the way of scholarly input here.
- (b)** In general, the responses showed an awareness that the context of the teaching came from chapters 5 and 6 of Galatians. Many responses struggled to accurately reflect on and analyse Paul's actual teaching, particularly on life in the Spirit. Some of the least successful responses made no reference to it all. Other responses saw Christian freedom solely in terms of freedom from the Law.
- The most successful responses were clear about Paul's teaching and made specific reference to it whilst critically analysing it in the light of today. Many responses attempted to take some aspects of Paul's teaching from Chapters 5 and 6 and make them applicable to today. Some did not go beyond the relevance of Paul's teaching for the time of writing and failed to include points, which related to today. Some responses weighed heavily on one side of the argument, the impact of which was to limit the achievement of a higher mark. The least successful responses gave a general overview on the relevance of Paul's teaching without making specific reference to any teaching.
- Q3 (a)** This was the least popular question. In general, the responses were able to show some knowledge of Paul's specific teaching on spiritual warfare. The most successful responses were specific about Paul's teaching and gave a clear understanding of what Paul meant by spiritual armour. They also included context and the importance of prayer. Less successful responses gave information on the armour without showing a clear understanding of what Paul meant. Some spent considerable time talking about other themes of Paul's teaching in Ephesians. Other responses were more general in nature and didn't focus on the key teaching in this area but addressed other areas of teaching such as spiritual gifts, which they appeared to interpret as being gifts that would aid a Christian in such a battle. The least successful responses were unclear about Paul's specific teaching on spiritual warfare and gave inaccurate information regarding the various aspects of armour.

- (b)** In general, the responses were aware of what it meant for Paul to be a shepherd and they took their evidence from two of Paul's letters. The most successful responses gave clear examples of shepherding from two letters, for example, Paul's pastoral concern for the disunity and immorality within the Corinthian Church and his advice on relationships and living the Christian life to the Ephesians. The most successful responses also focused on the 'sole' aspect of the task and were able to confidently analyse Paul's other roles, for example, that Paul was an evangelizer and protector of the gospel message in Galatians. Some responses showed knowledge and understanding of Paul's teaching without applying a critical element to their response. Some failed to recognise the importance of or make reference to the word 'sole'. Other responses were unclear of the meaning of 'shepherd' and some didn't make reference to another letter.
- Q4 (a)** In general, the responses were structured and many followed the expectations of rooting the response in scripture, making reference to non-taught course material, referring to the actual task and significantly linking to another area of study. The most successful responses made numerous, specific and suitable references to scripture and had a meaningful link to their other area of study which was sufficiently developed. Some responses developed non-taught course material at the expense of their scripture link. Others made a very vague link to their other area of study whilst some simply felt that mentioning any controversial topic in their other area of study was sufficient, even though there was no clear link. Many links were not developed. Some were one line. A number involved a page of retelling an event or incident in their other course without linking it to the task. Many responses attempted to answer the question using material prepared on the theme of reconciliation and tried to make their response 'fit' the task. There was ample evidence to suggest that some responses were simply prepared regardless of the task. The least successful responses didn't follow the format and were unclear about the requirements of the AO1 synoptic skill. Some responses were unclear about their other area of study.
- (b)** The most successful responses addressed the task completely and sought to present a varied argument with quality evidence and critical analysis. The most successful responses gave clear arguments for and against the question with a variety of relevant human experience to back up their points. The very best responses were not dominated by human experience examples but critical analysis. They clearly highlighted diversity of sensitivities and opinion. Some responses drew on knowledge from other areas of study, referenced religious beliefs, analysed such beliefs in comparison to experiences of the world and successfully came to a conclusion. Some responses successfully argued that the Church needed to change their stance on contemporary issues but some were less successful in considering how this might be done. Many responses gave evidence of how the morality of the world has dramatically changed since scripture was written. Many responses covered the topics of abortion, euthanasia and homosexuality. The least successful responses only used human experience as examples without forming arguments around them. Often these responses gave examples of why religious morality should either remain constant or change without explanation. A number of responses repeated material from the AO1 task or drew on taught course material.

## Assessment Unit A2 3 Themes in the Old Testament

### Overview

In the way they were framed, the questions facilitated candidates in demonstrating their understanding of the biblical texts, and in exploring possible relationships between the biblical text and the contemporary world. Question 2 was the most popular task addressed in Section A, closely followed by Question 3; Question 1 proved to be the least popular by a considerable margin. Overall, the paper provided an adequate platform for candidates to engage meaningfully with the tasks set, while also creating the opportunity for differentiation.

- Q1 (a)** The vast majority of candidates were able to address the question at some level. The most accurate, comprehensive and sophisticated responses paid close attention to the imagery, rhetorical pattern and theological implications of Hosea 11:1-11, with a specific focus on the struggle within the heart of God. Less developed answers tended towards a generalized discussion and offered less evidence of dealing with the text of Hosea 11:1-11.
- (b)** All candidates were able to attempt the question, demonstrating and enumerating how the God of the Old Testament is presented as having violent dimensions, incorporated into the characterization of the divine. Many were able to cite and utilize the concept of herem in their responses and meaningfully drew on appropriate biblical material. Less successful responses contained insufficient critical awareness, while more complex answers included greater balance, insight and attention to the compassionate aspects of God's character, exemplified in concern for the widow, orphan and foreigner.
- Q2 (a)** There was considerable evidence that candidates had been meaningfully introduced to the context and content of the private poems of Jeremiah, and this was reflected in the range of responses. The strongest answers took an integrated approach, in which they drew from a variety of poems, dealt with particular identified theological points of struggle and included discussion of the divine response to prophetic complaint. Many answers adopted a less integrated approach, in which they discussed individual poems in isolation.
- (b)** This question elicited a wide range of answers, containing a considerable range of approaches, of variable relevance. The most popular approach identified how Jeremiah condemned injustice in his era, before exploring contemporary examples of global injustice that need to be addressed. Many also included discussion of Jeremiah's criticism of established religion and how this finds parallels in the modern world. The most balanced and satisfactory responses contained arguments for why Jeremiah may not be relevant today.
- Q3 (a)** The theme of newness in the teaching of Ezekiel was evidently accessible at some level to virtually all candidates. It should be noted that a considerable number of candidates attempted to explicate several examples of newness, without explanation of why or any attempt at coherent integration into a wider discussion. The fullest answers examined one primary example of newness in appropriately significant detail but located this in the wider context of the prophecy of Ezekiel, including referencing other examples of newness and the theme of judgment and hope.

- (b) It may be noted that this proved to be a challenging task. Many candidates appreciated that the fall of Jerusalem vindicated the condemnatory oracles of Ezekiel and paved the way for the visions of renewal. The most sophisticated responses explored the parallel between the death of Ezekiel's wife and the termination of Jerusalem, including how Ezekiel rediscovered his voice when the herald arrived to inform the first wave of exiles that Jerusalem had fallen. A significant number of answers attempted counter-arguments, with varying degrees of success.
- Q4 (a)** An encouraging number of candidates demonstrated that they were able to present a case for the role of religious texts in both religion and society, but fewer focused on considering whether this role was key. Of those that did, several outlined the rise of secularism and the decline in religious practice as determining factors. The strongest responses framed their discussion in terms of hermeneutics and interpretation, with reference to the impact of specific texts. It should be noted that the link to another unit of study was relevant, substantial and well developed in many instances.
- (b) This task provided a suitable platform for candidates to explore the extent to which religious leaders continue to be an important source of moral authority in the modern world. Answers reflected different levels of understanding, insight, complexity and sophistication. As might be expected, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pope Francis were regularly cited as examples of moral authority, while the child abuse issue in the Roman Catholic Church and the practices of Westboro Baptist Church were commonly deployed in the counter-argument. Fuller and more successful answers contained a wider range of exemplification, allied to a higher level of critical awareness and nuanced debate.

## Assessment Unit A2 4

## Themes in the Early Church and the Church Today

### Overview

The feedback from the examining team indicated that most candidates had no difficulty in completing three questions in the allotted time. In Section A, Questions 1 and 2 were equally popular with fewer candidates choosing Question 3. The level of answering varied considerably. Most candidates were thoroughly prepared, and it was evident that many are giving much greater attention to the (b) parts of questions, recognising that these attract the higher marks. Part (a) of the Synoptic Assessment task in Section B proved challenging for some candidates and it may be helpful for some candidates to revisit the advice given regarding how best to tackle this aspect of the paper. In the A2 examination, the greatest challenge for most candidates is applying their knowledge to the questions asked. It is essential that candidates focus on the set task in order to achieve top band scores. It has been most gratifying to come across some outstanding scripts – an indication of both the calibre of students choosing Religious Studies and the high quality of teaching in schools.

- Q1 (a)** This question was answered in a variety of ways. Some candidates gave an outline of how the Canon of Scripture developed but failed to refer specifically to the statement. Many candidates knew the criteria applied by the Early Church when deciding on inclusion in the New Testament Canon – but often not applying this to the statement. The most successful responses were aware of all the aforementioned but presented a detailed case 'for this statement'. Clear references were made to the threats posed by various heretics such as Marcion, the Gnostics and the Montanists, and the importance of the Canon of Scripture in refuting these. Some responses focused almost entirely on other aspects which were vital for the Church's survival such as creeds and church government. The question did not require any of this as the focus was to 'present a case for this statement'.

- (b)** This task was good at differentiating between candidates. The most successful responses indicated a sound understanding of Irenaeus' polemic and used this to develop an informed and balanced argument. Clear reference was made to specific aspects of his writing and how these played a role in defeating particular teachings of the heretics. High scoring answers also engaged in critical analysis and referred to other individuals such as Tertullian and how his writings also helped defeat heresy. Reference to the development of Church government and creeds in defeating heresy also featured in many responses. The least successful responses often demonstrated a limited awareness of Irenaeus' polemic.
- Q2 (a)** This was a very straightforward task and there were some excellent answers. Many candidates displayed a sound knowledge and understanding of Tertullian's Apology and often included a range of accurate quotations. Some candidates digressed to doctrinal writings and this lack of focus prevented them from achieving top band scores.
- (b)** Many candidates found this task challenging as there were two prongs to it. In order to achieve a high score, candidates needed to be fully aware of Tertullian's moral writings pre and post his association with Montanism. The most successful responses identified particular writings and showed how his views had changed - on such issues as remarriage of widows and forgiveness for sins committed after baptism. Candidates then assessed whether these are 'unappealing for today'. Some responses omitted this aspect of the question. The least successful responses showed limited awareness of Tertullian's moral writings or confused them with doctrinal writings.
- Q3 (a)** Many candidates began their answer by defining secularisation. Some then continued to write a sociology essay referring to arguments for and against secularisation but failed to engage with the set task. Such responses could not achieve top band scores. The most successful responses gave clear examples of how secularisation has impacted on religion - both negatively and positively. Reference was often made to the work of modern-day apologists and how they have responded to the challenge of secularisation. Evidence of how religion has adapted in the face of secularisation was also offered. There were some quality responses to this question.
- (b)** Candidates answered this question well and approached it in a variety of ways. Some focussed on different models of Church leadership and how leaders are regarded, both by religious believers and members of society in general. This often included clear examples such as the role of the Pope and/or the Archbishop of Canterbury, and illustrations of their pronouncements on societal issues. Critical analysis often gave a full range of reasons, supported by evidence, as to why the authority of religious leaders has diminished. Reference was also made to examples of churches where the congregation is responsible for governance and where a greater emphasis may be placed on the role of Scripture and/or the Holy Spirit in guiding the beliefs and morals of the Church.
- Q4 (a)** There were many disappointing answers to this part of the question – even from candidates who had scored well in all other questions attempted. There are a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, many candidates provided several examples – the question required only one. This meant too long was spent writing, often in detail, about two, three or more examples of historical religion and state relationships. As a result of this, the link was often much too brief. Another problem with the link was that sometimes it was totally unrelated to the example used. It is important that adequate preparation is made in helping candidates identify appropriate links. Unfortunately, in some responses there was no reference to another unit of study.

- (b)** This was a generally well answered question – much better than Part (a). Many candidates were able to give a good range of human experience both to support and challenge the claim. In order to achieve band 4/5 scores, it is important that candidates go beyond giving examples, but instead use these to either support or challenge the need for ‘separation of religion and state’. The best responses were fully aware of appropriate examples of human experience from a range of countries such as France, USA, UK and Ireland. These examples were used to effectively evaluate the claim.

## Assessment Unit A2 5

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

### Overview

The feedback from the examining team was that the candidates made a very good effort to meet the assessment demands of the Specification in this unit. Overall, candidates performed very well in the paper and were able to recognize and respond appropriately to the mark weightings for A01 and A02. Indeed, the lesser mark weighting for the A01 task seemed to facilitate the production of concise responses which attempted to focus tightly on the question asked. This in turn ensured that many candidates could access the range of marks for A01 tasks, in most of the questions asked. There was also a perceived improvement in the quality of the critical assessment responses offered by candidates, although some tended to offer example led, rather than argument led, responses to A02 tasks. As with A01, 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 considerably 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, most candidates attempted to answer 2 questions from Section A, as well as the compulsory Section B question, which was very encouraging.

- Q1 (a)** Nearly all candidates responded to this question and the quality of the response offered varied considerably. Several candidates offered responses which were very restricted to the dispute in the wider church, rather than between Celtic and Roman Christianity. They generally referred to problems determining the dating of Easter, the outcomes of various Synods and the use of differing Paschal tables. Some responses in this category also went on to discuss other disputed practices, including the tonsure and sacramental variances and so became a little more focused on the dispute between Roman and Celtic Christianity. It was more difficult for candidates who responded in this way to access the range of marks available for the question. More effective responses were more tightly focused on both the issues and events in the dispute between Roman and Celtic Christianity which were instrumental in leading to Whitby specifically. Very effective responses combined this content with a high degree of understanding of the underlying issues in the dispute, such as political agendas, local autonomy, conformity and uniformity.

- (b)** Most candidates made a reasonable attempt to critically assess whether it was possible to get an accurate picture of what went on at Whitby. Some less effective responses did this through retelling, in narrative form, the events of Whitby. While some responses in this category did not offer a counter argument, others offered simple counter arguments, suggesting that, for example, the lapse of time, lack of eyewitnesses, might impede the accuracy of the picture gained. More effective responses avoided mere narrative, and instead evaluated reliability and validity of evidence, particularly that presented by Bede; hidden agendas of the protagonists, the debate among scholars on the impact of Whitby. It was heartening to see that candidates are beginning to identify the two prongs of these questions, in this case, the accuracy of what can be known about and the outcome of Whitby. Candidates who addressed and critically assessed both elements of the statement and were able to evaluate accuracy of what is known, impact of the Synod and the decline or otherwise of the Celtic Church after Whitby were able to access the full range of marks.
- Q2 (a)** The responses to this question were generally good. Most candidates identified and discussed two religious controversies. A small number depended on recalling events in the career of Columbanus, some of which may have included religious controversy. Some others included narrative on the early life of Columbanus which was not helpful in guiding their response towards answering the question asked. Of those responses that were more focused on the question, less effective responses were limited to describing the nature of the controversy itself rather than how Columbanus dealt with it. There were a pleasing number of candidates who did, in fact, focus on the actions of Columbanus in dealing with the controversies and were also able to explain his motivation and comment on what can be learnt about his character very effectively.
- (b)** This question elicited some very good responses. There were a variety of approaches taken to responding to this question. Some candidates focused on arguments and examples from the taught course, others assessed more contemporary issues, while some others combined both approaches. All of these were equally effective providing that candidates avoided simple narrative. The best responses identified clear reasons why the religious believer should avoid conflict, many referencing Scripture and then going on to inform the argument with evidence and example, either contemporaneous, historical or both. These were also able to counter argue, some with quite subtle, sophisticated insight touching on, for example, hermeneutics such as Biblical texts on conflict in connection to the development of Just War theory, or even the influence of utilitarian ethics. A fewer number of less effective approaches to answering the question, focused on the use of violence rather than conflict in the wider sense. Some offered a simple line of argument, without reference to other points of view or counter arguments.
- Q3 (a)** Fewer candidates responded to this question. However, in most instances it was very effectively answered, and the quality of response was very good. The most successful responses focused very closely on the question and identified a variety of key purposes of Trent, set in the context of the events of the previous Protestant Reformation and moving beyond that. Some of these went on to explore briefly whether the Council fulfilled those purposes and were able to draw on evidence from the various meetings of the Council. Less successful responses offered some simple purposes, such as the reform abuses in the Church and went on to describe what happened at some of the meetings rather than focus on purpose of holding them. In the main, where this question was attempted, it elicited the highest quality responses on the paper.

**(b)** There were some very successful responses to this question. There were also a variety of approaches taken to responding to this task. Typically, the best responses critically assessed the need for reform at the time of the Protestant Reformation, the church's response to the need for reform, and both the positive and negative, long term and short term, outcomes of the attempts to reform the church at that time. Many included the long-term legacy for Ireland in particular. A significant number of candidates also critically assessed the impact of other attempts to reform, typically referring to Vatican II and Trent; some also moved on to assess more contemporary issues about reform including Pope Francis' attempts to reform the Curia, reformation attempts in the Anglican Church and the Scottish Presbyterian Church. The strength of all these responses was the ability candidates had to evaluate and assess positives and negatives of reformation in each instance. There were some impressively well-informed candidates. There were also some quite effective responses which were confined to the Protestant Reformation, the Counter Reformation and their aftermaths. Less successful responses tended to be quite descriptive of the abuses in the Church at the time of the Reformation and their examples served as the argument. These tended to not critically assess the impact of the reform, rather limiting themselves to stating the need for it and perhaps moving on to argue the need for reform after abuse allegations in the contemporary church. They tended to typically offer little in the way of counter argument.

**Q4 (a)** The quality of response to this task varied. Some candidates offered more than one historical example of when religious believers influenced positively or negatively the morality of the State. In most cases these examples formed an effective part of the general response to the statement. More successful responses used effective historical examples typically including, Desmond Tutu, Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The best of these, really developed and honed their response in terms of how the State was impacted. In many cases, the weakness of the response was in terms of the quality of the link to the other AOS in terms of its relevance to the discussion offered. It seemed in many cases these links were selected at random. In addition, sometimes the connections to the other AOS were brief and not well informed. This was particularly true when the AOS was Luke's Gospel/the Synoptic Gospels. Furthermore, some less effective responses commented only on how religion might influence morality in general terms, typically in terms of citing the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule. They did not, in many instances relate this in any way to morality of the State. The strongest candidates discussed both an historical example, related it clearly to the State, chose an apt reference to their other AOS, which was both developed and integrated into the discussion they offered.

**(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 religion and State had their own responsibilities/concerns and whether they should remain apart. Typically, these responses evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of different models of religion and state relationships and supported this with reference to examples, such as, in the main, China, France, the U.S., Republic of Ireland, the UK and Iran. The most effective of these evaluated strengths and limitations and avoided mere description. A few very sophisticated responses evaluated the complexity of the relationship between religion and State by comparing various religious texts such as Romans and the Qur'an and drew out the implications of these. More limited responses only addressed one aspect of the statement, usually whether religion and state had their own concerns and responsibilities and did this through citing examples such as the repeal of the Eighth Amendment and same sex marriage. Overall, most candidates engaged with the task, albeit with varying degrees of effectiveness. In very few instances students produced narrative descriptions of examples of interactions between religion and state. This type of response to this question was in the minority.

## Assessment Unit A2 6 Islam in a Contemporary Context

### Overview

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 A02 responses. In Section A, all three of the questions were attempted although some questions were more popular than others. It was clear that most candidates were well prepared for the examination and the questions were accessible. In some responses there was clearly confusion about when other aspects of human experience were to be included and also when it is not appropriate to include taught course material. This was unfortunate. 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.

- 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 Akirah. In a number of answers candidates were able to make specific reference to or quote from Surahs while most were able to offer a summary of Qur'anic teaching. Stronger responses were able to show detailed knowledge and understanding on the varied views that exist in Islamic teaching regarding the afterlife. They also commented on what the Qur'an taught would happen on the last day and in the afterlife and how a Muslim's destiny would be decided. Some candidates were able to distinguish the different beliefs about Akirah from Sunni and Shia Islam, such as the Madhi would return rather than Isa. These candidates also commented on the importance of the belief in the afterlife for how Muslims lived out their daily lives. The most successful answers were those where explanatory comments were added throughout. Many responses made good use of scholarship to demonstrate their understanding. Weaker answers only gave descriptions of heaven and hell and showed minimal understanding of Qur'anic teaching on Akirah. 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 in order to evaluate whether or not human action is willed by Allah or humans are in control. Many responses were able to defend this claim. Some responses were able to see possible counterclaims. Those candidates attaining the top bands engaged with the statement and were able to assess the different beliefs held in Islamic thinking regarding predestination or see some of the difficulties presented by the belief in predestination, for example, can Allah will evil, how can Allah judge people if he has predestined their choices and destiny. 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 (which is the AO2 task). Less successful responses presented a description of predestination showing knowledge and understanding only. Weaker responses tended to misunderstand the question, did not refer to the statement, offered few arguments, did not offer a balance of arguments, were repetitious or lacked development.

- Q2 (a)** This was not a very popular question. Comprehensive responses showed detailed knowledge about the progressive split between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Stronger responses were able to show that while the initial split began with the death of Muhammad, there were other points in the Caliphate where the split was deepened and became irreconcilable. 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 and careers of the first four caliphs with little or no reference to the question or the quotation. Others demonstrated a very general, confused or basic knowledge. These responses may have lacked explanatory comments which are essential. In preparing candidates for A2 exams it is worth reminding them that the trigger 'present a case for' is still an AO1 task which is asking for knowledge and understanding and not evaluation.
- (b)** Candidates responded in different ways to this question, which examiners were open to. The strongest responses were able to offer a balanced or diverse critical assessment. Some were able to consider examples of positive Sunni/Shia relations today or negative relationships in the modern world. Some candidates looked at how Imam's are chosen and whether this was contentious today. Others were able to comment on the idea of whether leadership should be from the bloodline of Muhammad or a chosen person elected by the people. Stronger answers showed awareness of where succession and leadership had led to conflict in today's world. Weaker responses tended to outline the careers of the four caliphs with little focus on the question or the AO2 skill of critical analysis. Some responses offered a sophisticated analysis while others offered a shallow or repetitive evaluation.
- Q3 (a)** This was a popular question and in general was handled well. There were a number of approaches taken to the task in this question. In the strongest responses, the candidates realised that they were being asked to discuss the Islamic view of the family and in particular to focus on the 'importance' of the family. Comprehensive answers offered a selection of material discussing the Islamic ideal of marriage and family life while also offering comments about the significance of the family, for example, for the adults, for children, for the extended family, that it is a way to pass on the Islamic faith to the next generation, the extended family is a way in which support and care is provided, the value to the ummah and wider society. These responses tended to be well informed by the Qur'an and scholarship, which was impressive. Less successful responses were very brief focusing only on the roles of the father and mother, were general, or did not demonstrate understanding. Some answers focused on the Islamic understanding of the role and status of women within Islam which was partially relevant but did not directly address the whole question. 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 make use of and focus on the prefacing quotation. Some were able to balance information and arguments very successfully on both euthanasia and suicide. Some referred to Islamic attitudes to life support, the use of pain relief which may hasten death, the use of capital punishment in some Islamic countries, the idea of Lesser Jihad or the existence of suicide bombers killing themselves and others in the name of Islam. The strongest responses were those where there was clear critical thinking, balance and development of arguments. Some responses simply described Islamic views, blended euthanasia and suicide together, only made reference to one of the topics or did not fully utilize the material to make critical points. Weaker responses tended to find it difficult to offer counter arguments, offered very few arguments, were repetitious or lacked development.

- 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 how a religious community can maintain faith which was encouraging. It was clear that candidates had been well prepared given the variety of material which they were drawing on. Many candidates did restrict themselves to one example, as requested in 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, for example Paul's Letters, Luke/Synoptic Gospels or Ethics. Less successful answers tended to make a connection which was artificial or was not relevant to the theme/question, or merely set their non taught course material and that from the other area of study side by side with little or no explanation of the connection. In these responses there was clearly confusion and the task had been made overly complex. For the sake of clarity, candidates are to use non taught course material and then link this to their other area of study (e.g. Synoptic Gospels, Ethics, New Testament Letters). In a number of cases the answers were pursuing a different theme altogether and were trying to make it fit the question asked. This may have limited their overall success. Some answers were only offering material from the Islamic taught course but this is not required and should be discouraged as it contravenes the "double credit" ruling.
- (b)** Many answers offered a focused and critical response to the question which was intended to get candidates to explore the extent to which it is possible to have religious freedom within religious communities. In most responses there was a real attempt to engage with the question/quotation and to offer a critical analysis. 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/inclusion, the Asher's Bakery case, the Reformation, Galileo, women in the church, Corrymeela, the existence of different denominations, China, North Korea, Faith Schools, the Amish, Westboro Baptist Church. 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 outlined human experience case studies, with minimal critical analysis. In some answers there was only a defence of the claim and no counter-argument. There were examples of the question being misunderstood and these focused on freedom of belief being impossible within secular societies. Some candidates were drawing on Islamic taught course, which is not required by this task. The A02 Synoptic task should only be drawing on other aspects of human experience.

## Assessment Unit A2 7 Global Ethics

### Overview

The vast majority of candidates were able to fulfil the examination rubric by answering two questions from Section A and completing the compulsory task in Section B, all within the time permitted. There were some candidates, who appeared in order to complete the exam, ensured they answered Question 4 (b) and forfeited Question 4 (a). There were a small number of candidates who did not attempt Question 4 at all. As with the initial series in 2018, candidates were able to consistently provide substantial AO2 answers due to the respective mark weighting. As always, the onus is on the candidate to address the set question and to complete all tasks within the allocated time. It is reassuring to note that most candidates are able to do this. Another comment worthy of note, is the number of high calibre candidates who are studying the subject. It is also apparent from answers that learners are really engaged with the subject matter as their passion for the study of ethics can come across. This was particularly evident in answers to Questions 2 (b) and 4 (b). The quality of response was encouraging with the strongest responses addressing more pointedly the specific demands of questions.

- Q1 (a)** This was the most popular question in Section A. It was clear that candidates had prepared extensively for this question area and so had the confidence in opting for it. The majority of candidates were aware of the subject matter and made every effort to focus on the contribution of Aristotle to Virtue Ethics. Many responses were well informed and thus able to identify the key features of Aristotle's contribution – the moral and intellectual virtues, the vices and the Doctrine of the Mean. The more successful responses here were able to maintain the focus on Aristotle and offer a thorough and comprehensive answer on his contribution, for example, detailing the various moral and intellectual virtues highlighted by Aristotle as well as emphasising the importance of cultivating these virtues through habit and instruction. Less successful responses fell short on the details of Aristotle's contribution with key elements overlooked or drifted into other contributors following a brief synopsis of Aristotle.
- (b)** In general, the majority of candidates were able to engage competently with this task and were able to offer meaningful assessment with every attempt made to provide balanced reflection. Most of the responses were quite detailed with good development and candidates alert to the mark weighting for the AO2 (this was a feature of other Part (b) tasks as well) and so spent significantly more time on this part than their AO1. The better responses were those that targeted the set task focusing on whether Virtue Ethics provides rules or not. There were a number of quality responses here with many integrating the views of Anscombe, Foot, MacIntyre, Hauerwas, Hursthouse, Louden and Nausbaum with a number well aware of diverse views here and arguing that the failure of Virtue Ethics to provide rules is its greatest strength. Other candidates tended to offer a rather broad response on the merits and limitations of Virtue Ethics with much lesser profiling of the prefacing quotation. Some candidates appeared to be of the view that Virtue Ethics is an atheistic approach to moral decision making, which is not the case.

- Q2 (a)** This question appeared to edge Question 3 in terms of popularity. The quality of response offered ranged considerably with a number of candidates appearing to be unfamiliar with the concept of natural rights despite it being a key part of the debate about the nature of rights. Thus, a number of candidates focused on human rights with minimal scope given to natural rights and how the concept is problematic for some (the question). The more successful responses clearly engaged with natural rights, were familiar with the background here including relevant key figures such as Locke and Hobbes and were able to consider how they were problematic for utilitarians like Bentham. Some highly informed candidates brought in other figures such as Marx and Rawls. These same candidates were able to deliver successfully on the set task including delivering on the requirements of the question trigger, present a case for. Some candidates interpreted this question trigger as asking for evaluation, which was not a requirement. The least successful responses were those (though not many) who wrote about animal rights. Some candidates addressed the set task by looking at violations of natural rights which received due credit.
- (b)** While this task perhaps addressed challenging content for candidates, the general quality of their responses indicated that they had plenty to say about the practice with quite lengthy answers evident. It was clear that a practice such as Female Genital Cutting (FGC) can invite quite passionate responses. The most successful answers recognised that FGC is a cultural tradition rather than religious and so were able to respond directly to the task with many able to address arguments on both sides of the debate. These candidates had no real difficulty in appraising the practice in light of the utilitarian maxim included in the question. A number of candidates were able to reference Mill's Harm Principle with a number also aware of the views of Martha Nussbaum. Those candidates who did not reflect this level of sophistication were at least able to weigh up the issue in light of human well being (the vast majority were aware of medical complications) and human rights infringements. The least successful responses were those that were unfamiliar with the practice with some believing it to do with contraception.
- Q3 (a)** Candidates who opted for this question generally performed quite well. The strongest responses were those that not only offered a comprehensive grasp of the respective conditions (a significant number had an accurate awareness of all nine conditions) associated with jus ad bellum and jus in bello but were able to clearly articulate how jus ad bellum is targeted at political leaders while jus in bello is addressed to participants in war. These responses were invariably attracting the top bands as they were clearly seen to be dealing with the specific task - clarifying the distinction between both. The least successful responses were not able to offer the same degree of sophistication with inconsistency evident in the recounting of the associated conditions with inaccuracy evident at times.
- (b)** As with the other AO2 tasks in Section A, candidates were able to offer content worthy of credit here. The majority of responses were of a reasonable standard with the overall quality of the execution of the answer serving to discriminate across the ability range. Most candidates were able to offer balanced reflection on the merits of the Just War theory though it was the more alert candidates who spotted the issue of "global conflict" in the question and thus, ensured that this element featured in their answers. These same candidates went beyond a general evaluation of the theory and specifically dealt with the merits of the theory when confronted with aspects of global conflict such as nuclear weapons and terrorism. Other quite competent responses weighed up Just War theory in light of other alternatives such as pacifism and realism. Overall, this was a generally well answered question.

- Q4 (a)** It appears that this particular task was generally problematic for candidates with a number of examiners reporting significant issues, for example, those candidates attempting to make a rehearsed answer for another synoptic theme fit to this question, responses that did not use any taught course material, links that were at times rather contrived, non-existent links, how in some cases the link to the other area of study was the only material offered, the ignoring of the question trigger – present a case for, and in some cases no answer at all. This led some examiners to the view that the quality of this synoptic response had regressed since last year. Amidst all of this, it was heartening to hear examiners comment that there were candidates who stood out, who did develop the case for the role of the state in protecting personal liberty and drew on non-taught course material in doing so, for example, the thinking of Aristotle, Locke, Hobbes, Rawls. It was in these responses that there was, more often than not, a clear and meaningful link to their other area of study.
- (b)** This question was in the main well answered and more often than not was in stark contrast to the candidate's AO1 response. The vast majority appeared to be really engaged with the task displaying a similar passion to that evident for Question 2 (b). As with other AO2 tasks, it was the overall quality of the execution of the response that served to discriminate effectively across the ability range. The most impressive answers were those that contrasted state protection of rights and state violations with how religion has protected rights and yet at the same time has been guilty of violations. These answers were often invariably erudite, well balanced, engaged in real and meaningful critical assessment with examples drawn from other aspects of human experience used to augment the points being made. Many candidates were well informed on examples pertaining to Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the U.K., issues in the spotlight in American politics, and religious extremism. Weaker responses tended to be driven by the listing of examples from other aspects of human experience rather than an engaging in real critical assessment, answers of an unbalanced character, answers that repeated content from the taught course in ethics or answers where the reasoning and clarity was problematic.

## Assessment Unit A2 8

## Themes in the Philosophy of Religion

### Overview

There is a small but consistent candidature entry for this module. The paper seemed accessible to all candidates with the majority of candidates responding to the three questions required in the time allocated. Differentiation was primarily seen in depth and breadth of the responses provided. Top band responses clearly honed in on the actual question set, selecting philosophical views and teachings best suited to task. This was particularly evident in Section B (Question 4). It is important for candidates to tailor their responses to address the question task set.

- Q1 (a)** This was the most popular question in this assessment unit. There were some exceptionally strong responses to this question with candidates being able to both delineate the Verification Principle and draw out the implications for the veracity or otherwise of religious language and religious historical records and thus its impact on religious belief as a whole. Ayer's teachings and Wittgenstein's early views in particular were explored by many candidates. The distinction between weak and strong verification was drawn out by a number of candidates and Hume's fork analogy was also popularly cited within answers. A number of candidates argued that the Verification Principle was flawed and/or limited in scope and so had no relevancy to any discussion concerning religious belief with some candidates exploring fideist views as part of their responses. Top band responses were able to provide specific examples of where the Verification Principle impacted upon religious language and belief.
- (b)** The majority of candidates linked this statement to Wittgenstein's writings on language games. Differentiation was primarily seen in depth and breadth of candidates' responses to this claim. Most candidates referenced Wittgenstein's latter view that religious language was indeed a separate language game. A number too explored the idea of Via Negativa in their responses. There were some sophisticated responses to this debate task in evidence, with candidates directly addressing the issue as to whether religious language was indeed different and if so, what were the implications of this position. Scholars commonly cited within candidates' debates included Flew, Aquinas and Ayer.
- Q2 (a)** This was some considerable diversity in levels of response to this task with top band candidates able to correctly delineate John Hick's Replica Theory. Most candidates referenced the John Smith analogy within their responses and correctly identified Hick as a materialist. A number opted to explore the issue as to whether or not his theory supported bodily resurrection. Weaker band responses were less specific about the actual Replica Theory itself and/or simply noted that Hick's Replica Theory supported resurrection, reincarnation and/or rebirth without offering supporting evidence for their claim. A number of candidates opted to critique Hick's Replica Theory within their responses.
- (b)** The AO2 task in the main was better answered than the AO1 task. It was clear that most candidates were prepared to explore the success or otherwise of materialism in disproving the idea of life after death. Popular scholars referenced included Ryle, Flew and to contrast, a variety of dualist scholars including Descartes, Plato and/or Aquinas. Weaker band answers simply listed evidence for and against life after death without drawing links to materialism and in a small number of cases, candidates confused the terms dualist and materialist.

- Q3 (a)** There was some diversity in level of response to this task. Top band candidates were able to both present Aquinas' moral argument, often citing his exact words, and provide a detailed analysis of this argument. Precise technical vocabulary was evidenced in a number of responses. Weaker band responses provided a basic summary of Aquinas' moral teaching in general and offered little explanation of the argument itself. A number of candidates opted to challenge the validity of this argument within their responses although this was not a requirement of the task.
- (b)** There were some very strong answers to this task with top band responses very successfully integrating a diverse range of scholarly views to both support and challenge this claim. The views of Freud, Nietzsche, Dawkins, Sartre and Kant were among those popularly referenced. A number of candidates noted that morality had social and/or evolutionary roots. Reference to the work of Pavlov and/or Skinner concerning behavioural conditioning was popular within candidate's answers. Christian counterclaims too were particularly popular. Differentiation was primarily seen in the development of candidate's responses with weaker responses often listing scholars with lesser development of their views on this issue.
- Q4 (a)** Top band responses directly addressed the question set, namely that religion acts as a support for the oppression of humanity and successfully drew a link to their other unit of study. In a small number of cases candidates misread 'supports the suppression of humanity' as 'supports humanity' effectively looking at the counter argument to the stated claim. There were a number of approaches to this task, some candidates opted to explore one scholar's teachings, sometimes citing allied influences and/or subsequent scholarship on this scholar's views. The views of Nietzsche, Marx or Dawkins were commonly explored. Other candidates selected an issue to explore, for example, that Determinist views held by religion, notably Calvinism, oppressed humanity, or that Church attitudes toward women were oppressive. Both approaches to the task were valid. In some cases, candidates provided lengthy counter arguments to the claim however the AO1 task asked the candidate to present the case for the stated claim. The majority of candidates linked their second unit of study, most commonly ethics. Those responses which employed clear links to their other unit of study were successful.
- (b)** There were some exceptionally strong responses to this debate task, with candidates exploring the issue as to whether atheism truly offered freedom and was the sole route to truth. The views of Lennox, Dawkins, Atkins and Hitchens were commonly cited and there were some extremely apt scholarly quotations provided. There was also some very good use of statistics to support the candidate's argument. Many candidates cited the acts of religious extremists notably ISIS/Islamic State and those repressive atheistic states such as China and Stalinist Russia. Top band candidates were able to explore a number of scholarly views to sustain their debate often in some considerable depth and successfully addressed the two issues within the question namely "offering freedom" and the "sole route to truth". Weaker band responses provided rather superficial examples with some believing Nazi Germany to be atheistic.

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