GCE

Religious Studies

Report on the Units

January 2009

CONTENTS

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Religious Studies (H172)

REPORT ON THE UNITS

G571 Philosophy of Religion

General

There were many excellent scripts from candidates who had prepared well for the examination. However, some candidates seemed unaware of the demands of the revised specification which covers a wider range of topics than the former Unit 2761. Some candidates had learned just traditional proofs and disproofs of the existence of God and tried, rather unconvincingly, to answer questions just on the basis of these.

As ever, the candidates who performed well were those careful to answer the precise question set. Some were handicapped by poor written English and a number clearly struggled with correct use of technical terms such as 'refute'. '*a priori*', '*a posteriori*', predicate and 'proof'.

Comments on Individual Questions

1   (a)   **Explain what Aristotle meant by final cause [25]**

This question produced some very good answers. Although there was no requirement to do so, many were able to develop accurately the relationship of Final Cause and Prime Mover. Unfortunately, weaker candidates often confused Final and First Cause, and, if they moved to the Prime Mover, then argued for God as initial cause and creator of the universe. Attempts to Christianise Aristotle, or to attribute to him arguments found in Aquinas, were disturbingly common. Some candidates thought only in ethical terms.

(b)   **To what extent does the concept of a final cause teach us anything about the real world? [10]**

Answers to this were often disappointing. Too many were content to argue that Aristotle pointed out the purpose of everything, sometimes arguing in purely Christian terms of God showing his purpose for mankind. Relatively few questioned a teleological interpretation of the universe. Some good answers were constructed by looking at features of the universe which appear to have no purpose or by arguing that 'purpose' is essentially a feature of consciousness which cannot just be assumed of the inanimate.

2   (a)   **Explain the Judaeo-Christian concept of God as lawgiver and judge. [25]**

Many candidates dealt with the Decalogue, sometimes attributing to it commandments which would have surprised Moses, though most seemed unaware that God was not creating *new* commandments but rather reminding his people of the ways of righteousness they had forgotten. There was much reference to the Garden of Eden. A few candidates gave useful accounts of the Thomist notion of God's law being intrinsic to the structure of the universe. Relatively few looked to either the New Testament or the Q'uran as evidence. Accounts of God as judge were sometimes less developed than those of him as lawgiver.

Some candidates appeared to think that 'Judaeo-Christian' was the name of a particular faith.

(b) **'God has no right to judge human beings.' Discuss. [10]**

This question proved difficult for some. There were some unconvincing arguments that by giving free will, God had lost the right to judge his creation, and a few candidates argued along the lines of 'Who does God think he is, to judge us?', to little effect. Some argued, to some effect that for God to judge us from a position of omniscience meant that he could not understand, as a peer might, the reality of human limitation. Others raised interesting questions about divine foreknowledge.

3 **(a)** **Explain the theodicy of Irenaeus [25]**

This was a popular question. Some, perhaps inevitably, confused Irenaeus and Augustine. A significant number used Augustine and the Garden of Eden as the explanation of the origin of evil, before then developing Irenaeus and soul-making. Many candidates seemed able to deal with Irenaeus on moral evil but, perhaps because they had assumed an Augustinian model, struggled with his response to natural evil. There was some good use of Hick's Irenaean theodicy, though many seem to remain unaware that universal salvation is a notion peculiar to Hick: it is not found in Irenaeus.

(b) **'The theodicy of Irenaeus cannot justify the existence of evil.' Discuss. [10]**

There were some very interesting arguments. Some candidates were aware of Phillips' attacks on soul-making theodicy and most were aware of issues of dysteleological evil, though this is a technical term they are not required to know, and the sufferings of the innocent and of animals. Many made reference to the sheer scale of human suffering.

4 **(a)** **Explain how religious believers respond to challenges posed to them by scientists. [25]**

This was an open question, with a wide range of possible legitimate responses, which proved to be popular with many candidates. For some, its very openness was a difficulty, but the better responses marshalled chosen material effectively. Many candidates were more aware of the challenges than of responses. Better candidates were aware that responses are various and nuanced, depending on prior belief, but too many thought that all believers were fundamentalist creationists whose response was a flat denial of science.

(b) **'Religious believers understand the world better than scientists. Discuss [10]**

Again, a variety of responses were possible. Weaker candidates tended to take the line that, 'If it's true for you, then it's true', while better ones considered whether the field of interest was identical. A few resorted to the 'Science explains the 'how', religion the 'why' ' argument, which does not convince all thinkers, but some interesting arguments were built on the notion.

G572 Religious Ethics

General Comments

This was the first time candidates had sat this new AS examination and the responses were very mixed. Some candidates were well prepared for this examination and used the extra time to plan and write detailed answers.

However, some responses were very poor, and were too short considering the time now given. Some answers lacked depth and it was too early in the course for these candidates to have been entered.

Comments on Individual Questions

1   (a)   Explain how a belief in the Sanctity of Life may influence ethical approaches to abortion.

This question was popular and good candidates showed both a grasp the teaching on the Sanctity of Life and abortion.

This year there were some excellent responses on the Sanctity of Life which showed that candidates were really able to apply the biblical teachings, making links with Natural Law and discussing the question of the sanctity of Life of the mother and of the foetus. There were also good discussions of personhood.

This year there were less of the general GCSE type approaches to the question.

(b)   'A foetus is not a person.' Discuss.

This question elicited some very good discussions of what constituted a person, with good use of ideas from Mary Ann Warren, Peter Singer and Jonathan Glover.

There were some good discussions of potentiality versus actuality and the views of Natural Law and the Sanctity of Life.

Poorer responses simply discussed whether the life of a foetus was sacred or not.

2   (a)   Explain how Bentham's version of Utilitarianism can be used to decide on the right course of action.

Most candidates could distinguish the Utilitarianism of Bentham from that of Mill, though some focussed their answer on the difference between the two.

Poorer responses consisted of extensive story-telling with little explanation.

Good answers explained how the hedonic calculus can be used to make ethical decisions, with good use of straight forward and practical examples to illustrate this.

(b) **'Utilitarianism is the best approach to euthanasia.' Discuss.**
Straight-forward answers simply discussed the merits of Utilitarianism as an approach to euthanasia, generally coming down in favour as it made most people happy.

Better responses considered the different forms of Utilitarianism and how they would approach the issue, or compared it to religious approaches such as Situation Ethics and Natural Law.

3 **(a)** **Explain the ethical teachings of the religion you have studied.**

This was the least popular question, and was either answered very well or very badly.

Those candidates who produced good answers were able to contrast the different approaches found in Christianity from Biblical ethics to Natural Law, Church teachings and Situation Ethics. Many candidates here are to be congratulated for the breadth and depth of their answers.

However, this question also attracted some poor responses where candidates simply wrote about every ethical theory they had studied from Utilitarianism to Kantian ethics.

(b) **'Some religious ethics are too rigid for modern decision making.' Discuss.**

Weaker candidates did not notice the word 'some' and simply argued that all religious ethics were out-dated and of no use in the modern world as they came from the Bible.

Better candidates looked at the word 'some' and compared the different approaches within Christian ethics to modern ethical issues such as embryo research.

G578 Islam

General Comments

There were only 26 candidates but a range of ability was represented. One candidate gained almost full marks. Some scripts were a pleasure to read.

The four questions were virtually equally popular. They seemed to be of equal parity and differentiated well.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 **(a)** **Explain why Muhammad is called the final messenger of Allah.**

The candidates who chose this question tended to begin with an introductory paragraph placing Muhammad in the setting of Arabia in the beginning of the seventh century CE.
Most explained (often with much extra detail) that Allah had sent many messengers before but the message had been corrupted.
Some took the opportunity to recount the incident in the cave when Jibrail instructed Muhammad to recite and they used this and the fact that the prophet could not read to explain that the angel told Muhammad exactly what his role would be.
Others also quoted the last sermon and/or parts of the Night Journey to reinforce the fact that the Qur'an is believed to be the final complete uncorrupted revelation from Allah.

(b) **'Muhammad's character was central to the early growth of Islam.' Discuss.**

There was some variation in the way the candidates interpreted the term 'character' in the question and any sensible approaches were accepted. Some concentrated on his personal qualities and others on his actions to discuss what made Muhammad so pivotal a character in what happened.

Discussions were interesting in that most also considered that it was Allah's choosing of Muhammad that was actually the central factor. That led some of them to assume that Allah could have found another means of revealing the Qur'an and to wonder about the previous corruption of the message then to return to the theme of the centrality of the character of Muhammad in his role as the final messenger.

2 **(a)** **Explain the religious background of pre-Islamic Arabia.**

Candidates tended to include trade routes in their synopsis of the comings and goings of various believers influencing the region besides fairly detailed accounts of the polytheism and animism of pre- Islamic Arabia and the importance of pilgrimage to Makkah.

On the whole, the question seemed to be chosen by candidates who felt confident handling the background so there were some good responses. Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism tended to feature and some excellent responses also explained the possible significance of the Hanifs in preparing a religious climate ready for the preaching and teaching of Muhammad and the spread of Islam.

(b) **How far was Islam a rejection of the beliefs and practices of pre-Islamic Arabia?**

Discussions continued on from the material each candidate had used in the first part of the question. Some found it easier to list obvious rejections such as of polytheism and then to list certain elements of continuity, particularly the pilgrimage. Others concentrated on the rejection of perceived corruptions of messages given through earlier prophets and Judaism and Christianity. Surprisingly few mentioned the change in prayer times and direction.

3 **(a)** **'Show us the straight way…' (Surah 1:6)**
Explain what Muslims mean by 'the straight way'.

Surah 1 is a set text. Some candidates began with a brief introduction to al-Fatihah, the opening to the Qur'an, even quoting the whole passage, before giving an exegesis of the quoted text. Some saw the opportunity to write about the Five Pillars. This was a valid interpretation and development of the question and was accepted. Others saw the Sunnah, the example of Muhammad ﷺ, as the most obvious explanation of what Muslims mean by 'the straight way'.

(b) **'Following the "straight way" is not a realistic goal for a Muslim.' Discuss.**

The discussions were interesting but sometimes allowances had to be made for slightly peculiar interpretations of the words 'realistic goal', especially when candidates had taken the first part of the question to be, 'Write all you know about the Five Pillars'. Candidates who had rooted the first part of the question in Surah 1 usually had no difficulty with the destination of the straight way. Mostly, they argued that Muslims who prayed to be shown the path, and who studied the rest of the Qur'an, would receive the grace to reach the goal.

4 **(a)** **Explain how the practice of salah and zakah might purify Muslims.**

Most responses had detailed explanations about the two practices. The main weakness was in addressing the wording of the question and dealing with how the practices might purify Muslims. Ritual preparations for salah were linked with spiritual purity and quotations from the Qur'an and ahadith were used. Purity from greed and from envy were often mentioned for zakah but surprisingly few mentioned the idea that zakah cleanses the remainder of a person's property.

(b) **Religious practices benefit the Muslim who observes them more than they benefit the Islamic community.' Discuss.**

Some candidates took the word 'observes' literally and explained what can be beneficial about watching somebody else do the movements properly. This interpretation was accepted but obviously limited the scope of the response.

There were some thoughtful discussions, however, especially about the benefits of the beliefs of Islam as a blueprint for a whole way of life and some good examples of the interaction of the practices of individuals in the context of the local and the global ummah.

G579 Judaism

General Comments

A small number of candidates sat the paper but they appeared to have a reasonable grasp of the subject matter and the overall standard was encouraging. There were no rubric infringements and candidates appeared to have balanced their time between the two questions. However, the examiners noted that some candidates were writing over-long responses to part (b) questions – given the marks available.

In general, candidates wrote well, displaying good grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Comments on Individual Questions

1   Candidates tended to identify Law as the literal word of G-d communicated by Him to Moses on Mount Sinai. Surprisingly, little consideration was given to the importance of the Oral Law in Judaism and to the significance of the mitzvot.

    In (b), candidates to focus on the importance of the practical implementation of kindness to Jewish daily life. Hillel's saying was quoted: 'What is hateful to you, do not do to others.'

2   Responses were generally good, especially with regard to Pesach and Sukkot. Candidates were aware of the importance of Shavuot as the commemoration of G-d's giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, but failed to mention the significance of 'the counting' (49 days, beginning with the second night of Pesach) and which appears to connect Shavuot with Pesach. Surprisingly, candidates did not make specific reference to the Biblical text where the three festivals are mentioned and ordered.

    In (b), candidates did not agree that the Pilgrim Festivals served no purpose: Pesach, in particular, inspires hope for all Jewish people.

3   Explanation focused on the physical practices of niddah, largely in respect of the mikveh. The Torah origins of the purity laws were not discussed.

    In (b), there was useful discussion of the benefits of the laws of family purity. The view was that niddah is central to the marriage relationship from an Orthodox perspective, although Progressive Judaism would see the use of e.g., the mikveh, as being no longer of relevance.

4   The question elicited some good responses. Candidates were generally aware of the main features of daily worship such as the set prayers and their observance with correct ritual dress. They noted how Sabbath worship in the home is centred around the table. There was good discussion of the Torah origins of shacharit, mincha and ma'ariv.

    In (b), while all candidates recognised the value of spontaneous and extemporary prayer, there was equal regard for the benefit of prayers at set times of the day.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Religious Studies (Aggregation Code H172)
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
G571	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G572	Raw	70	53	46	39	32	25	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G573	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G574	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G575	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G576	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G577	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G578	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0
G579	Raw	70	53	45	37	30	23	0
	UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
N/A							
N/A							

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
N/A							
N/A							

0 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.