



**2003**

**Religion and Society GA 3: Written examination**

### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

Religion and Society students are demonstrating a clear and well-supported understanding of the course content as required by the study design. Certainly they vary in their ability to express their understanding, but it is pleasing to see that students who struggle with expression and vocabulary have adopted short sentences and an adequate, simpler vocabulary to convey their meaning. More students are consciously relating their material to the question throughout their responses rather than just at the start and finish.

Students showed they were more familiar with key study design terms this year, but this is an area for consistent work, as is attention to all the bullet points under knowledge and skills in the study design.

This examination has questions in Section A that are clearly different from the questions of Sections B and C. Section A questions focus on identifying and explaining these specific concepts within the study design that form the foundation for the content selected for detailed study. This content for detailed study was the focus for questions in Sections B and C. These questions direct the students to focus on quite specific parts of their content studied in Units 3 and 4. These questions allow even average students to use their knowledge and challenge them to think and consider it more deeply. These questions also provide the opportunity for more able students to respond to the subtlety of meaning in the questions to show their breadth and depth of understanding and to explore creatively their studied material. All questions are thoroughly grounded in the study design concepts and vocabulary. The emphasis in the questions was where the students had to pay attention.

### **Connections**

The issue of connectedness in the content studied remains an area for attention. Core beliefs of a religious tradition are the foundation for the investigation of the specific content of courses taught; and beliefs are consistently present in the language of the study design. Identifying beliefs, investigating how they are understood by believers, investigating how they are expressed through other aspects of religious traditions, investigating how these beliefs have been influenced over time and in particular situations, investigating how beliefs and their expression have influenced believers and the wider society – is the focus of whatever content is chosen.

### **Content**

The selection of appropriate content is another issue for continued attention and it was pleasing that some topics were more contained this year. Others remain too big, especially in Unit 4 Challenge and Response, where students continue to show confusion about what is ‘challenge’ and what is ‘response’.

Students who try to use the same content for questions across Sections A, B and C of the examination, disadvantage themselves. They do not show a sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge of the religious tradition or the particular beliefs, challenge, social action or personal faith experience to cover one let alone two or three responses. Usually it is the same content sandwiched between or interspersed with sentences repeating the question. While there are always some valid points made, the bulk of such responses, is descriptive storytelling.

### **Instructions**

Careful reading of instructions remains a problem. Students need continual practice in unpacking questions and identifying their focus. They should also ensure they have a good understanding of instructional words.

For example:

#### **Discuss**

Students need to be very familiar with this instruction. They should understand that it tells them that more than one view, or one way of understanding, or one reaction, or one response, needs to be at least mentioned in their answer. Obviously not all of these will be explained in the same level of detail. Students will select the most appropriate for the examples they have studied. What is not adequate as a response to a ‘discuss’ instruction is to turn it into ‘describe’ and proceed with a detailed description of an example from one perspective.

### **Context**

Big picture contexts are important. Understanding the general nature of religion and of religious behaviour and of the various types of responses of religious traditions to challenges is a necessary foundation upon which to build the understanding of specific examples. It really is not enough to know about and discuss one challenge or one person to the exclusion of discussing the big picture and the general nature of religion, religious behaviour and experience. Even

within the particular examples studied it is important that students not demonstrate only one way of understanding a core belief or only one type of interaction between a life experience and a person's faith or only one type of response by a religious tradition to a challenge.

Students who have discussed a range of examples are better able to discern the 'general' within the 'particular' and this certainly broadens their understanding of the dynamic nature of the interaction of religion and society and increases their ability to respond to examination questions. Such students are better able to use clearly the focus example to illustrate the general, which is often required within examination questions, as for example in Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 and indeed in Questions 1, 2 and 3 of the 2003 examination paper. These students are less likely to overdo the biography or the historical overview in their responses. They have more options when selecting content to use for different questions on the examination. Thus they avoid the repetition of material across sections of the examination. Also they are able to respond more fully to the question asked rather than reproduce tasks from their coursework. The emphasis in the examination questions is different to this school assessed work.

### Analysis

Students need to give more evidence of analysis in their responses. Some provide a very 'rose-coloured-glasses' view of their material and this restricts their ability to successfully demonstrate their competence in the knowledge and understanding assessment criteria of the examination. Students must remember that they are not writing about their personal faith but about the belief and practices and experience of the religious tradition of their study in its dynamic interaction with society. Some topics, such as sexual morality, birth control, ordination of women, various bioethics issues, evolution, seem to lend themselves more to subjective accounts by students that show very little breadth or depth of knowledge let alone analysis. Students should have the opportunity to access and discuss a range of interpretations on their chosen topics as they undertake their objective investigations.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

### Section A

#### Units 3 and 4

The short-answer questions were done much better this year, but it is another area for consistent work. Short-answer questions require careful selection of content. They are seeking quality of information not quantity. Longer answers do not necessarily add relevant information, and they often rob students of time for other questions.

#### Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	4	6	10	16	23	22	19	3.93

**Name a core belief of a religious tradition you have studied. Why is this core belief essential to this religious tradition?**

This question covers Unit 3, Area of study 1 Meaning in Religious Traditions with emphasis on the following key knowledge bullet point from Outcome 1:

#### Explain and evaluate the significance of core beliefs in religious traditions.

Student should have chosen from the range of core beliefs in the selected religious tradition. The response needed to show understanding of the nature of core belief. Therefore, a core belief must be identified clearly. Attendant beliefs were not acceptable for this question. Then the pivotal place of that belief within the tradition's belief structure had to be shown. The student should be able to explain that without that particular core belief the tradition would be fundamentally different, perhaps even unable to continue as that distinct religious tradition.

Many students from various Christian traditions, Judaism and Islam, referred to the core belief in a monotheistic God. This was accurate as a start, but the students found it difficult to explain its essential nature to the particular tradition beyond the point of monotheism. So the selection of the core belief appropriate to the question is an area for further work in the classroom. For example, in Christianity the core belief in one God who became Incarnate or who is Trinitarian, would have been more useful than God the Creator for this question.

#### Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	3	5	10	19	23	22	18	3.90

**Name a particular event or movement or issue that has significantly challenged a religious tradition you have studied. Why was this a significant challenge for that religious tradition?**

This question covered Unit 4, Area of study 1 Investigation of a Significant Challenge with emphasis on the following key knowledge bullet point from Outcome 1:

#### Identify the nature and context of a significant challenge to a religious tradition.

The question focused on the term 'significant'. The response needed to show understanding that a challenge, which is significant to the religious tradition as a totality is going to touch beliefs and perceptions at the centre of that religious

tradition's self understanding and within a specific historical context. The response needed to explain the reasons for choosing that particular challenge to the selected religious tradition with reference to its impact on core beliefs, self-understanding, or even continued existence.

Many students wrote far too much for this question, giving detail excessive for the style of question and the marks allocated. Often this meant the students ran out of time for their essays. This question was, however, done quite well by a large number of students.

### Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	6	7	9	13	15	14	14	13	9	4.38

#### What is the relationship between belief and ritual in a religious tradition you have studied?

This question covered Unit 3, Area of study 1 Meaning in religious tradition with emphasis on the following key knowledge dot point from Outcome 1:

#### Explore the interconnection between beliefs and rituals.

Students should have given some general statements explaining the relationship and at least one specific example which showed the what, how and why of the relationship.

Many responses repeatedly made the point through a number of examples, that beliefs are expressed through rituals. This was correct, but more explanation of the nature of that expression and the purpose of it was required by the question. Students could have considered the transforming effect upon the individual or group through the experience of the belief embodied in the ritual symbolism, spoken or sung prayer, or enactment of an event or action. For example, many students writing from the Christian tradition used The Sign of The Cross as their example of belief expressed in ritual. Whilst they were often unable to clearly state how this symbol is also ritual, they were aware that it was both and that it was part of public and private acknowledgment of a particular religious identity. Some students also noted that the sign of the cross was a prayer statement acknowledging the specific belief in a Trinitarian God who is believed to be the source and focus of life and a commitment statement to a way of life, which perceives that all that Christians do, is for the praise and honour of God.

Students writing from the Judaic tradition mostly used the Sabbath or the Passover or the funeral rites as their examples and generally explained the relationship clearly, although there were some who did not go beyond the statement of the relationship of mutual expression between belief and ritual. There was a tendency in the responses of the students who used the funeral ritual as their example, to lose sight of the question as they explained the ritual in excessive detail for the question.

Students writing from the Islamic tradition used the ritual of prayer or pilgrimage as their examples. Whilst the students were aware of how ritual acknowledged belief and affirmed personal and group faith and identity, they were generally unable to support this with a clear example of action or words from within a ritual.

Students writing from the perspective of the Traditional Aboriginal Spirituality did this question very well.

## Section B

### Unit 3

#### Question 4 (Available marks 40)

**'Core beliefs of religious traditions encourage growth and change in human beings.'**

**Discuss this statement, using your study of the life experience of an individual or group belonging to a religious tradition you have studied.**

This question covered Unit 3, Area of study 1 Development of Religious Beliefs with emphasis on the following key knowledge bullet point from Outcome 2:

#### Draw conclusions about the interplay between religious core beliefs within a selected tradition and important life experiences.

The response need to show how the core beliefs of a religious tradition form the world-view of its faithful, how the core beliefs translate into values and attitudes about life and its purpose and quality. The response should have shown how this creates a situation of tension with other values in a particular society, which in turn creates an impelling situation to take action for growth and/or change. This general condition could then be illustrated by one or more particular examples. Biographical detail should be minimal and purposeful in answering the question.

This was a very popular question. More successful responses explored the notions of change and growth. They showed that not all change is positive, nor indeed is all growth, as it may be growth of fear or hatred or despair or sectarianism. Although generally the discussion of this statement was cursory as growth is taken as positive development by most students and change seems to be generally regarded as something negative. This is especially the case with students

who mistakenly applied the notions of growth and change to the core beliefs rather than to the human beings under discussion. These concepts need more objective investigation by students.

The better responses minimised the storytelling within this area of the study, but this is still prevalent in many responses to this question. Teachers might consider whether it is necessary to this part of the course to cover the life story from birth to death of the individual or the step by step development of the group including the life story of the founder. The study could perhaps begin with the situation of growth and change, identifying the current beliefs and how and why they are different from the time before the particular life experience being studied. Other background and context details could be added as the need for explanation arises.

This is one of the weakest areas of the study in a large number of student responses. Many students know the what and how and why on a superficial level but cannot go beyond the generalised statements claiming growth or decline of religious belief. So whatever the technique developed to assist students in this area, it is most important that they are developed.

In this part of the study some religious traditions may need to take a resistant position to the question. This is always an option for students in any of the questions.

#### **Question 5 (Available marks 40)**

**‘The greatest restriction to the development of religious beliefs within a religious tradition is the fear of change.’ Discuss the extent to which this statement is true for a core belief/s of a religious tradition you have studied.**

This question covered Unit 3, Area of study 2 Development of Religious Beliefs with emphasis on the following key knowledge bullet point from Outcome 3:

**Explain continuity have core religious belief/s and developments in expression of core religious belief/s.**

The response should have explored the diverse nature of change. More than one example may be used to illustrate this discussion. Responses should have shown understanding of the need for development of beliefs as part of a living religion embracing the needs of the faithful in a given context. Responses should clearly differentiate between core and consequent beliefs and expressions of belief though the other various aspects of religion.

This was a reasonably popular question, well done by the students who had a broad understanding of the concepts of change and development. Those students who attempted this question from a limited perspective on these concepts struggled to relate their material to the question. The discussion of the ideas of fear and restriction challenged all who did this question. And yet there were many successful efforts in thinking through this question. Two weaknesses across the responses to this question were the lack of dates or a time context and the failure to state clearly the core belief/s being discussed. Historical inaccuracies abounded in responses to this question.

Resistant responses were appropriate and produced some of the most successful responses.

### **Section C**

#### **Unit 4**

#### **Question 6 (Available marks 40)**

**Discuss how the love of God and concern for others are expressed in a vision of human community that has been developed by individuals or groups in a religious tradition you have studied.**

This question covered Unit 4, Area of study 2 Beliefs in Action with emphasis on the following key knowledge bullet point from Outcome 2:

**Analyse the interplay between beliefs and actions using examples of individuals or groups in religious communities.**

Biographical detail is to be minimal. It should be selectively used to answer the question. Responses should clearly show how the concepts of love of God and neighbour arise from the core beliefs of the religious tradition and discuss their relevance to the ethical principles of that religion. One or more particular examples should be used to illustrate this.

Responses needed to address the focus of this question which directed students to deal with their studied individual or group within the context of the beliefs and ethics of their religious tradition.

This was another popular question and like Question 4 suffered from excessive biographical detail, most of which was unnecessary information and rarely was there any attempt to relate it to the question. Although the question did not mention the concept of an ideal society many answers focused on this, ignoring the emphasis of the question. There were few serious attempts to discuss what is meant by ‘love of God’ and ‘a concern for others’ especially within responses from the Christian and Islamic traditions. Often ‘love of God’ and ‘concern for others’ was summarised as ‘helping the poor and needy’ without being specific as to who they were or the nature of their need or why they should

be helped, according to that religious tradition. The function of specific core beliefs in this person's or group's vision and work was often overlooked or merely mentioned without trying to discuss how these beliefs were understood and applied in the actions of the studied individual or group.

The admiration for these individuals or groups, apparent within the students' responses indicates an enthusiasm for this area of the course, so it is disappointing that it is done so inadequately. Answers indicated essays learnt by heart, rather than an interesting topic thoroughly researched and considered.

**Question 7 (Available marks 40)**

**Resilience:** *-the ability to recover from or adjust to unexpected change or disturbance.*

**(Australian Oxford Pocket Dictionary)**

**Using the above definition, discuss the resilience of a religious tradition you have studied, when it has been confronted by a significant challenge.**

This question covers Unit 4, Area of study 1 Investigation of a significant Challenge with emphasis on the following key knowledge bullet point of Outcome 1:

**Analyse and evaluate responses of a religious tradition to a significant internal or external challenge.**

Responses must deal with the concept of resilience, which challenges students to discuss the various ways in which the religious tradition responded to the selected challenge. More successful responses may draw some general observations about the manner of response of religions to a significant challenge. One or more challenges may be used to illustrate their contentions.

Not a very popular question and some students chose the wrong content for their response, using their case study as an example of personal resilience. Other responses focused on describing the challenge and the reasons for it, to the neglect of the discussion of resilience of the religious tradition in its ways of dealing with the challenge.

There were, however, some excellent answers to this question, especially from the students studying the Judaic tradition and traditional Aboriginal Spirituality.

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