

# 2022 VCE Religion and Society external assessment report

## General comments

Most students seemed to have carefully read the examination paper, as there were few wrong responses. In addition, most students contained their responses within the provided lines, showing an ability to select the material/response appropriate to the question.

Generally, students were able to demonstrate a working understanding of the aspects of religion and how they interact. They were able to identify and answer general questions. Some students made creative links between designated stages of life experience and religious beliefs that may affect an individual at that time without referring to a specific religious tradition.

Many students from various religious traditions successfully outlined the tradition's beliefs about both the nature and, separately, the purpose of human life, as well as the beliefs about death and the afterlife.

A number of responses showed some attempt at analysis of the beliefs of the chosen individual using specific references to substantiate their comments.

Responses to questions about challenges succeeded when students very briefly gave the context information, then homed in on the requested stances and supporting responses with accurate references from key persons or sources.

Knowledge of the challenges and how the aspects were involved in terms of what was challenged and their role in the stances and responses was evident in clearer understanding of the difference between a stance and its supporting responses, challenges accurately stated and dated and effective use of sources to support answers.

Some students successfully demonstrated the skill of comparison in showing the similarities and differences of involvement of aspects within the challenges.

## Areas for improvement

Personal pronouns were used in some student responses, which are not appropriate, as Religion and Society is an objective study of the interaction between religious traditions and society over time. The focus is on the whole tradition, the leadership overall or of a particular era, certain groups with specific perspectives, a particular individual or the general membership of religious traditions. When a question asks what the religious tradition believes about a particular topic, the response should use the official teaching of the tradition rather than personalised understandings.

Some terms in the questions were overlooked, especially terms joined by 'and', such as 'engender and nurture', 'death and the afterlife', and 'nature and purpose of human life'. Each of these terms required separate details in responses.

It is important for students to apply their selected religious tradition or denomination correctly in history. The particular tradition or denomination cannot be referred to as present in a challenge that occurred prior to its existence.

The range of individuals used in case studies for Area of Study 3.3 was as follows.

- Oscar Romero
- Teresa of Kolkata
- CS Lewis
- Elie Wiesel
- Jan Ruff O’Herne
- Pope John Paul II
- Esther Wachsman
- Malcolm X
- Karen Armstrong
- Desmond Doss
- Sister Helen Prejean
- Marc Weiner
- Father Rob Galea
- Desmond Doss
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Cardinal Bernardin.

Some case studies, such as those of Father Rob Galea, Cardinal Bernardin, Sister Helen Prejean, Pope John Paul II and Teresa of Kolkata, were not successful choices, as students overdid the biographical detail and were vague on the precise religious beliefs of the person. Thus they could not demonstrate the nature of change in specific beliefs as required in the third dot point of Key Knowledge and Key Skills.

Below is a list of challenges that proved to be more successful in responses. They were time- and context-contained, mostly accurate in content and showed evidence of more than one reference studied.

- Climate change / Environment
- Euthanasia / Voluntary assisted dying
- Artificial contraception
- Riba in Islam
- COVID-19 – impact on religious practice
- Women’s ordination
- Child sexual abuse
- Same sex marriage
- Justice for refugees
- Modernity
- Benedict Spinoza.

The following list of challenges were less successful, as responses showed confusion over the focus of the challenge, factual errors and lack of a relevant wider context for the challenge. Some of these challenges were so broad over time and place that only vague generalisations were made. The knowledge and understanding of these challenges presented in responses seemed limited by insufficient research.

- Protestant Reformation
- The Black Death
- Medieval antisemitism
- Crusades
- Islamophobia
- Vatican II
- Arian Controversy
- The Great Schism
- Heliocentrism/Galileo
- Roman persecution of early Christians
- The Nazi Holocaust

- Rise of Islam
- Hasidism
- Death of Mohamed
- Early Muslim persecution
- Industrial Revolution – abuses of human dignity
- Darwin’s theory of evolution.

Particular attention needs to be given to Area of Study 3.1, the various categories of belief relevant to a particular religious tradition. Students need to use language that states the beliefs precisely and accurately. The Key Knowledge and Key Skills related to the connection between beliefs requires much development.

Some students wrote excessively long responses, especially for high-mark questions, with some students going into three or four booklets. Such lengthy responses do not necessarily equate to high marks, as they are likely to ramble, give unnecessary and irrelevant detail, contradict earlier statements and show an inability to select content appropriate to the question.

## Specific information

### Section A

#### Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	5	34	40	21	1.8

Some points that students could make included:

- Some opportunities for spiritual experiences are structured within a ceremony or accompanied by specific rituals that offer repeated actions or prayers that are intended to promote a spiritual experience. This provides an enhanced connection with ultimate reality.
- Rituals are a way of re-enacting previous spiritual experiences such as significant religious events or transformative moments in a religion’s history. This could enable further spiritual experience, that is, a deeper, closer relationship with ultimate reality.

The aspect of spiritual experiences was poorly understood, with many students claiming that partaking in any ritual automatically achieved a spiritual experience.

This was a general question, not to be answered from the perspective of a specific religious tradition. Responses that did so were not given full marks. Responses that simply repeated the terms ‘spiritual experiences and rituals’ without showing an understanding of their nature, did not receive full marks. Responses that dealt with only spiritual experiences or rituals, but not both, could only receive one mark.

#### Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	13	28	31	18	6	2.7

This was a tradition-specific question. The tradition and the example of the ritual and its related spiritual experience needed to be clearly identified, then the response needed to **show how** the particular ritual facilitates the spiritual experience.

The connection may be separately noted from the perspective of the ritual and then from the perspective of the spiritual experience, or woven into the whole response. Students could expand on the connection between rituals and spiritual experiences through a particular belief.

The term 'demonstrate' required some descriptive detail. The particular features of the selected ritual were usually well described, but the related potential spiritual experience was often left at just the term and a claim that it happens. Students are advised to refer to the [glossary of command terms](#) on the VCAA website.

## Question 2

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	23	32	25	11	2.1

Expanded and varied understandings of the meaning of particular times can be physically demonstrated through rituals, special places and spaces, symbols and artifacts. Personalised meaning can be acquired through spiritual experiences during those festival and memorial times.

Although it was not necessary, students could use the other aspects within their response to explain the role of 'times' within the search for meaning.

Some points that students could make included:

- Times are connected to particular beliefs, events and traditions.
- Times are communicated and explained through the texts, sacred stories and theological and ethical instruction by leaders and organisations within the overall social structures of religions.
- These explanations and understandings offer nurturing support and engender answers in the search for personal and communal meaning.
- Times provide opportunity for communal expression of meaning.
- Times can enhance an individual's sense of identity and purpose.

The element of 'times' within religion was poorly understood.

This was a general question, not to be answered from the perspective of a specific religious tradition. Responses that did so were not given full marks.

## Question 3

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	7	25	35	21	12	2.1

Some points that students could make included:

- Symbols can be abstract or tangible representations of the personally accepted or official meaning of beliefs.
- They provide insights and reminders for the individual and the community for establishing and developing the why and the how of human existence, thereby giving meaning for their lives.
- Symbols provide a breadth of extra meaning to a belief, as they can be understood in many ways according to the level of knowledge and life experience of adherents.
- This breadth of meaning of the symbol itself offers insights into the meaning of life.
- By evoking the past, symbols stimulate and foster powerful recollections of the events and people of that past.
- Symbols proclaim and promote the relationship between humans and the divine.

Many students missed out on marks because they dealt with only one of the terms. An explanation of how both terms contributed to meaning had to be in the response. The difference in the terms needed to be

shown, so just repeating the phrase 'engender and nurture' usually did not achieve this. Using synonyms for each term would help students to develop successful responses, though the related term for the synonyms needed to be clearly indicated.

This was a general question, not to be answered from the perspective of a specific religious tradition. Responses that did so were not given full marks. Responses that only repeated the terms 'engender and nurture' without showing what they mean could not receive full marks. Responses that dealt with either 'engender' or 'nurture', but not both, could receive no more than two marks.

## Question 4

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	9	19	30	27	15	2.2

The illustration for this question showed a range of significant life experiences across the span of human life. Whichever of the stages of life were chosen, there needed to be clear identification of the related general significant life experience and explanation of how religious beliefs in general may influence that experience.

Students needed to indicate which figures in the illustration they were using in their response. For example:

Referring to the last image on the right, the tombstone, religious beliefs can offer an explanation for death, that death has a role to play in the understanding of life. Some religious beliefs offer the hope of life after death, that death brings peace, as suggested in the sign RIP. Religious beliefs can provide some certainty or comfort as death is approached for both the dying and the bereaved.

The figure of the infant was mostly referred to as birth and led to confused claims about the religious beliefs of the infant rather than those of the parents or religious community.

Many responses lost marks as students moved into tradition-specific religious beliefs. This was a general question, not to be answered from the perspective of a specific religious tradition.

## Question 5

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	6	12	20	23	22	13	5	3.0

Some points that students could make included:

- Religious traditions offer answers to existential questions for all people, providing a way of understanding the meaning and purpose of life.
- Religious traditions provide ethical guidelines to complement or challenge the principles, values and standards of the ethics of society outside the religious traditions.
- Religious traditions provide services for the welfare of individuals and communities in wider society, supporting the government/secular services and often providing the major part of such services.

The concept of wider society was poorly understood. Many students changed the question focus to adherents, individuals or groups, rather than religious traditions as a whole.

There were unrealistic claims (especially those about conversion to the religion) about the nature and extent of the influence of religious traditions upon wider society.

This was a general question, not to be answered from the perspective of a specific religious tradition. Responses that did so were not given full marks.

## Question 6

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	8	17	31	29	16	2.3

Some points that students could make included:

- The responses may conflict with the worldview and perspectives of the wider secular society, which may have a more dominant voice, thereby minimising or negating the intended purpose of the response of religious traditions.
- The responses were short-sighted and failed to recognise the complexities of the challenge, thereby proving inadequate to deal with the challenge and unable to achieve their intended purpose.
- The responses did not acknowledge differences of opinion within the tradition so that the responses taken did not have full tradition support, which weakened the effectiveness of the responses in achieving their intended purpose.
- The responses failed because the religious tradition did not have the power or authority within the wider society to implement the responses.
- When challenges persist for lengthy periods, the initial responses may become inadequate or inappropriate in the changed circumstances and therefore not achieve their intended purpose.

This question was focused on responses taken by religious traditions and why they may not have achieved their intended outcome. But many students lost this focus and dealt with the nature of challenges.

This was a general question, not to be answered from the perspective of a specific religious tradition. Responses that did so were not given full marks.

## Section B

### Question 1a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	8	28	27	20	13	2.9

This was a tradition-specific question. Whichever beliefs were outlined needed to be clearly stated and accurate for the stated religious tradition.

At least two beliefs needed to be stated. There should have been a belief about the **nature** of human life and a belief about the **purpose** of human life according to the stated religious tradition.

If students omitted either nature or purpose, then two marks was the maximum for that response.

## Question 1b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	3	10	28	31	20	10	2.9

This was a tradition-specific question. Whichever beliefs were outlined needed to be clearly stated and accurate for the stated religious tradition.

At least two beliefs needed to be stated. There should have been a belief about **death** and a belief about the **afterlife** according to the stated religious tradition.

If students omitted either death or the afterlife, then two marks was the maximum for that response.

## Question 1c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	24	34	23	10	2.0

This was a tradition-specific question. At least two valid points should have been made about the connection between the beliefs to gain full marks.

Responses needed to clearly explain how the beliefs stated in parts 1a. and 1b. as a whole related to each other. There was no need for the connections to be a one-to-one relationship between beliefs in parts 1a. and 1b., though some students attempted this.

Many responses simply restated the beliefs from parts 1a. and 1b. without attempting to explain the connection between them.

There needed to be terms used to show the connection, such as:

- Beliefs about the nature of human life leads into / logically extends / builds on / flows from / complements beliefs about the purpose of human life.
- Beliefs about death and the afterlife complete the understanding of the cycle of life established through the beliefs about the nature and the purpose of human life.
- All the beliefs stated about the nature and the purpose of human life, and about death and the afterlife are interconnected and flow from the underpinning beliefs about the nature of ultimate reality in the particular tradition.

For the whole of Question 1 only one religious tradition should have been used.

In parts 1a. and 1b., many students did not deal with both aspects of the questions. Beliefs about the nature of human life and beliefs about death were largely ignored. Many statements were so vague and humbled as to be inaccurate for the religious tradition stated.

Overall, the responses to these questions about the theological ideas of a particular tradition indicated that Area of Study 3.1 needs more careful attention to detail to help students express them clearly.

## Question 2

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	4	4	10	13	15	14	15	12	10	4	2	4.9

In some case studies, the beliefs (i.e. the theological ideas) became different and this may have arisen from greater or narrower understanding of the ideas. These differences in ideas could be accompanied by different levels of trust/faith in the beliefs, by modifications to adherence to the beliefs in the way they are

lived out in the person's life and by changed attendance or participation in ritual and symbolic expressions of those beliefs.

In other case studies, the beliefs remained the same, but the expression of the beliefs in other aspects altered a great deal, which indicated that the understanding of and maybe faith in the beliefs varied as well as the expressions of the beliefs in other aspects of religion. Possibly the expressions in other aspects could be the main way that the beliefs changed.

These statements above of general possibilities for the meaning of 'change' in beliefs would need specific content detail supported from the thinking and words of the person in the case study or from commentators.

This was a tradition-specific question. The response was to be supported by relevant sources.

The key issue here was 'how far' the change in beliefs went. The beliefs before and after the significant life experience had to be clearly stated. It was not enough to say 'beliefs about God'. The particular beliefs about God needed to be identified. This lack of precise theological statements was a prominent issue in many responses. There were numerous entire responses that at no point articulated the actual belief held by the person studied.

The term 'change' needed more clarification. It was insufficient to claim 'the belief changed' or 'the belief was unchanged'. What exactly had become different?

An inefficient aspect in answering questions about Area of Study 3.3 is the excessive and unnecessary detail about the background of the person studied. All that is required is the name of the person with their location in place and time and the identification of their significant life experience, in two to three sentences. Where they grew up, what type of person they were and all the gradual steps in their life up to the point of the significant life experience are all irrelevant details.

Too many students wrote almost a whole page on this biographical detail, which was irrelevant to the question asked.

Use of sources needs more careful selection so that they are relevant to the question asked. The quoted references should support the claims made by the students about the question focus, not the unnecessary background or storytelling detail.

## Question 3a.

Mark	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	35	40	18	1.7

Some points that students could make included:

- The leadership element of social structure provides direction and control of how to manage and respond to challenges.
- The laity (general membership) of a tradition are the element of its social structure that provides the large numbers to support official stances or to reject them and even counter them.
- The leadership and the general membership of the social structure of a religious tradition can act as a barrier to prevent challenges developing by taking direct action against the challengers or banning and preventing members' engagement with the challenge.
- The leadership of the whole tradition and of significant groups can also act as facilitators of principled positions and strategies in dealing with challenges, providing the means for carrying out the responses.
- The various groups, institutions and authority figures provide supportive responses for official stances towards challenges.

At least two **valid** points needed to be made to earn the three marks.

Student responses needed to go beyond the leadership within the social structure of religious traditions. A hierarchy in leadership is not part of all religious traditions. Responses that dealt with only leadership and claimed all leadership was hierarchical could not achieve more than one mark.

This was a general question, not to be answered from the perspective of a specific religious tradition. Responses that did so did not receive full marks.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

*Social structures are the way a religion shapes itself in relation to members, including leaders and the roles everyone plays such as in responding to challenges. The leaders may create stances to be enacted in various supporting responses by significant individuals, or groups or the general membership of the religion to deal in a united way with a challenge.*

### Question 3b.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Average
%	4	4	10	16	20	17	15	9	5	4.3

This was a tradition-specific question. The response was to be supported by relevant sources.

Student responses had to focus on the various elements of the social structures of the religious tradition.

Students may have used the points they made in part 3a. within their explanation of the particular tradition's social structures decisions and actions related to the specific challenge. But they did not have to, as they might not have been relevant to the case study they were using for this part 3b.

Some points that students could make included:

- In explaining which stance(s) and supporting responses were taken by the general membership/ individuals/groups/leadership of the particular tradition, students could have shown that the various elements of the social structures were in agreement and acted harmoniously.
- There could have been disagreement over the stance(s), resulting in lack of full support by some elements of the social structures for implementing the supporting responses.
- If there was such disunity, then some part of the social structures may have had to vary the stance(s) and devise different supporting responses.

A lot of time and space were wasted on unnecessary detail of the challenge itself. The question just required a precise sentence naming the religious tradition and the challenge with location and time period.

The focus of the question was the stances and the supporting responses taken by particular elements of the social structures of the religious tradition. Some responses twisted this to deal with the stances and supporting responses of the person or group that was the source of the challenge.

### Question 3c.

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	12	16	25	23	15	8	2.4

This was a tradition-specific question.

Both the religious tradition **and** the wider society had to be addressed in the response, though this may not have been in equal depth because of the challenge and the tradition selected. If both were not present in the student response, full marks were not awarded. Two marks was the maximum for such a response.

Some points that students could make and develop with content relevant to the religious tradition and challenge included:

- As a result of the stances and supporting responses, the whole tradition or particular aspects or certain groups within the tradition came under threat or were changed in identifiable ways.
- As a result of the stances and supporting responses, the whole tradition or particular aspects or certain groups within the tradition became stronger in identifiable ways.
- As a result of the stances and supporting responses to the challenge, particular changes in the wider society (members of the society outside that particular religious tradition) were precipitated.
- As a result of the stances and supporting responses, the relationship between the religious tradition and the wider society changed in certain ways.

This question highlighted a lack of knowledge about the broad content of the particular challenges. The concept of wider society was inadequately understood.

## Question 4

Mark	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	8	4	8	12	16	14	14	12	8	3	2	4.6

The challenges used in Question 4 needed to be different from the challenge used in parts b. and part c. of Question 3.

If one of the identified challenges was the same as that used in parts b. and c. of Question 3, then no marks were awarded to its use in Question 4. The maximum for such a response was 4–5 marks.

This was a tradition-specific question. The response was to be supported by relevant sources.

In their response, students could focus on only similarities or only differences or do both. All were acceptable approaches to the question.

Although students might have referred to only one way of involvement, these two aspects could be the focus of the challenge and also the means for response of the tradition to the challenge.

Either way of referring to the involvement of the aspects could earn full marks.

The focus of the comparison is in how the same two aspects were involved similarly or differently in the two challenges.

Most students took the approach of outlining the involvement of the two aspects for one challenge and then for the second challenge. But statements comparing the involvement of those aspects within the two challenges, if present at all, was poorly demonstrated. One sentence at the end of the response claiming the aspects were involved in the same way or were involved differently was inadequate for this question.

This question highlighted that responses needed to be more carefully considered.