

2000 HSC Notes from the Examination Centre Studies of Religion

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Studies Of Religion

Section I

Question 1 (10 Marks)

This was the compulsory question. Candidates appeared to be uncertain of how best to link the boxed statement to the various parts of this question.

Part (a) – Generally this was answered well, although some candidates still had difficulty in differentiating between a tradition and denomination.

Part (b) – Some candidates had difficulty in understanding what was intended by the term ‘community development’. Generally responses were good, however the question tended to lend itself to lengthy responses. Many candidates wrote in too much detail for a three-mark question.

Part (c) – Candidates did not understand the meaning of the word ‘commonality’. They responded at times with material learnt from the Preliminary Course, in particular describing the characteristics of religion. The better responses gave specific examples in the Australian context of expressions that religions have in common, e.g. the ecumenical movement and the tragedies of Port Arthur and Thredbo, or their work with refugees etc. This part of the question was not well answered.

Section II

Question 2 (15 Marks) – 2 Unit Only

About two thirds of the 2 unit candidature attempted this question. The majority of responses demonstrated excellent understanding of this content area.

Excellent responses used the quote well while articulating the connectedness between the Dreaming and the Land Rights Movement. When addressing the Land Rights Movement, candidates demonstrated the capacity to use specific examples and discuss their impacts for the aboriginal people. In part (b), the best candidates were able to give an appropriate perspective on the consequences, analysing the negative inputs as well as the benefits.

Almost all candidates were able to answer this question, with the poorer candidates providing general or brief responses. Good responses expressed the connectedness of Aboriginal peoples’ spirituality with the land and hence the Land Rights Movement.

Question 2/3 (10/15 marks)

Of the two options in Section II, question 2 was by far the most popular. Within the question, part (b) was answered better than part (a), perhaps due to candidates’ familiarity with this content from past examination/specimen papers.

However confusion existed in use of the stimulus material and the statement directly below it. In particular, candidates interchanged the terms ‘religious division’ and ‘diversity’.

Better responses in (a) attempted to make specific reference to the impact of division and/or diversity on the development of society in Australia. This was supported by accurate examples. Similarly in part (b), better responses provided accurate examples of how Australian society has been influenced by Christianity. Excellent responses provided a range of variants with the tradition.

Question 3/4 (10/15 marks)

The number of candidates who chose this question was considerably less than those who chose question 2/3.

Question 3 required candidates to analyse the changing patterns of belief in Australia since WWII. Candidates were required to discuss the effects of these changes on Australian society from the perspective of at least two religious traditions.

Better responses gave a comprehensive analysis using supporting examples of both religious and secular effects on society. The majority of candidates only referred to two traditions, many in a very superficial way – food and restaurants rated highly, closely followed by religious architecture.

One concern was the number of candidates who limited their response to the factor of immigration only, because they tried to place their response in the context of the stimulus statement. The question itself refers to changing patterns of belief, not the effects of immigration only. Once again the boxed statement did not seem to help the candidates to fully answer the question.

The discriminating factors for the question were

- the ability to analyse rather than simply describe
- referral to both secular and religious effects
- examples from two traditions done equally well.

Question 4/5 – Rites Of Passage (30 marks)

Rites of Passage retained its popularity this year with a significant number of the total cohort attempting this question. The question discriminated between those who had ‘prepared’ responses and those who could answer the question on the paper.

The question required candidates to firstly define the term ‘rites of passage’ and describe similarities in civil and religious rites of passage. Candidates were able to define the term and list examples of civil and religious rites of passage. However, many candidates had difficulty in drawing out the similarities in their examples and only the best candidates managed to do this well.

In part (b), it was evident that many candidates knew the rituals but were not able to indicate how an individual was transformed by this rite of passage. Some could not distinguish the rite from the ritual.

A literal interpretation of 'place' and 'practice' was most common in part (c). Average responses merely outlined a rite of passage with minimal comparison across the two traditions. Better responses were able to link place and practice to beliefs.

Too many candidates have prepared answers and found it difficult to answer the question directly. Also, there remains a problem with reference to cultural differences rather than differences in religious interpretation between variants in a tradition.

In choosing variants, candidates need to be careful not to write about a tradition focussing on only one variant – such as Catholicism in Christianity. Additionally, candidates who write about unusual variants need to be careful not to give the impression that these are representative of the tradition as a whole.

Candidates need to plan their essay well to allow sufficient time for part (c).

Question 5/6 – Religion And Ethics (30 marks)

After Rites of Passage this was the most popular choice.

Some candidates had difficulty with the word 'element' in part (a). The better responses could define elements like sacred stories and give specific and accurate examples. Some also contextualised them within an ethical framework and demonstrated a sound understanding of the question.

In parts (b) and (c), some candidates did not treat the whole issue, but instead spoke of marriage only (instead of marriage and divorce) or violence only (without war and peace).

The better responses in part (b) gave a comprehensive treatment of the whole issue with responses from both traditions including variants where possible. Overall, this section was answered quite well.

In part (c) the better responses demonstrated a coherent and comprehensive discussion of their own view with a clear comparison with the responses of the two traditions. Candidates generally found this difficult to do, and gave descriptive responses often with their own view tagged on at the end with limited comparison. Some candidates chose to write about abortion as an ethical issue in itself, or dealt with it in sexual behaviour with no justification. Overall there was evidence that candidates had an understanding of the content, but difficulty in integrating it into the response, especially in part (c).

Question 6/7 – Sacred Stories And Writings (30 marks)

In part (a), candidates tended to name a theme but did not describe its meaning within a religious context. Examples, particularly from those who chose death or fidelity, looked at a rite of passage context rather than the broader theme. Often there was no reference to the texts to give support to the statements being made. For some candidates, a description of a religious ritual was all that was given. Best responses limited examples to text.

Part (b) responses gave good descriptions of the sacred writings and stories with some attempt to outline why and how they were used. The 'how' outweighed the 'why' in the majority of responses. Only a few candidates chose the same tradition for part (a).

Part (c) responses needed to look at different genres, kinds of writings and the way the writings are positioned within the overall traditions. Best responses did this very well, but a large number of candidates answered in terms of the 'physical' position of the text in the worship space. Many candidates were able to list specifics about each tradition, but not to compare and contrast. A number of candidates appeared to have chosen this question without previous study. Their poor quality of responses was obvious when compared to those who had studied the topic.

Question 7/8 – Ways Of Holiness (30 marks)

Most candidates were conversant with the differences between ordinary ways and special ways of holiness. The better candidates were able to trace the development of a special way of holiness (part a) while being able to use quotes from sacred writings or refer to other sources (part b).

Part (c) created problems for some candidates, as it was an analysis question looking at contemporary cultural influences on two religious traditions. Many covered one religious tradition well but found difficulty when challenged with the second tradition. The best candidates were able to articulate the positive effects as well as the challenges to holiness of contemporary society.

The majority of candidates covered Christianity, with Hinduism and Buddhism being the next most popular, and then Judaism and Islam.

There were a number of candidates who attempted this question with no evidence of background study and hence performed poorly.

Question 8/9 – Teachers And Interpreters (30 marks)

This question was attempted by a small number of the total candidature, 235 candidates in 1 unit and 103 in 2 unit. The most popular traditions were Christianity, Islam and Judaism, with some choosing Buddhism and Hinduism. By and large, candidates had difficulty in addressing the specific requirements of the question.

Part (a), on the whole, proved difficult for candidates who tended to ignore the cultural and/or social factors and simply described the specific teachings of the individual or school of thought.

In part (b), responses tended to remain biographical, though better candidates were able to discuss the situation to which the individual/school was responding, i.e. the period of growth, division or crisis, and what it was (from the traditions and foundation beliefs). In other words, candidates really tried to grapple with the question and look at the particular interpretation of the individual or school of thought.

Part (c), again, proved a difficult task for most. A large proportion of responses were biographical and descriptive. There was little attempt to address the crucial part of the question, which was to analyse the influence of these teachings on the tradition (the third outcome of p60 of the syllabus). In some cases there was confusion as to what constitutes the early foundation period of particular traditions.

Candidates attempting this question would benefit from greater concentration on the outcomes of the syllabus and subsequent tailoring of the information they have learnt to these.

Question 9/10 – Women And Religion (30 marks)

Candidates had plenty of information to impart on women and religion but many had difficulty in coping with the demands of the question.

In part (a), the majority of candidates tended to provide biographical detail. Those who wrote about Christianity were either very good or very poor, the latter tending to be simplistic and lacking objectivity. Examples from Islamic women were generally very sound. There were few examples from Hinduism and Buddhism, and Jewish examples tended to be very broad with little or no reference to particular women, or they were biographical accounts of Deborah, Ruth or Esther.

In part (b), some candidates assumed that the question was directed at the middle period of the tradition as defined in the ‘Areas for study’ in the syllabus. Others drew on the contemporary period and were therefore limited in part (c), yet others attempted to draw on examples from the entire history of the tradition. Better responses addressed the question of interpretation and referred to the tradition as a touchstone. However, most candidates found this difficult and tended to present a catalogue of what significant women did or how they challenged their respective traditions.

In part (c), the better responses dealt with a range of problems, questions and issues and articulated varied responses. Candidates however, had some difficulty in grappling with the ‘why’. This was often implied rather than discussed explicitly. Average responses tended to provide a narrower discussion of issues, often only one per tradition. Some tended to discuss social and cultural issues without relating them to the religious tradition – this was particularly the case with candidates who had studied Islam.