



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Religious Studies**

**RSS10**

**(Specification 2060)**

**Unit K World Religions 2:**

**Christianity**

**Judaism**

**Islam 1 The Way of Submission**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General Comments

Most candidates were entered for the Islam section as in previous sessions of this exam. Once again there were some very high quality responses. Clearly many candidates (particularly on the Islam and Judaism sections) had been well prepared for this exam and displayed some excellent knowledge and understanding throughout. The paper seemed accessible to all, though it has to be said that some candidates still appear to have some difficulty with the dialectical 'for and against' structure of the 15 mark questions. As in previous sessions, the more able discuss the issue and put their own well thought through conclusion to the evaluative statement, leaning towards one side or the other.

## Section A Christianity

There were relatively few candidates for this section of the paper, but Questions 1 and 4 were the most popular.

### Question 1 *Some beliefs about God: Trinity and salvation*

- 01** Answers to this question varied between the very good, dealing with titles rather than just Jesus, and the more mediocre or weaker responses focusing narrowly on Jesus himself. It was pleasing to see that some candidates were familiar with Christological doctrines.
- 02** This question was addressed well by some candidates who went on to discuss the nature of Trinitarian belief and poorly by others who offered a rather generalised approach to the issue. Stronger responses tended to look into whether there should in fact be no parts to God as such if he is to remain unknown to the intellect and others discussed how God can communicate in different ways alongside how the Trinity shows the power of God more effectively. Very few seemed to grasp the point that there are many things that lie beyond our ordinary sense experiences and the Trinity does not necessarily denigrate the idea of monotheism.

### Question 2 *Christian Scriptures: nature and purpose*

- 03** Not a popular question and not answered particularly well by candidates. It is important for teachers to note here that some candidates just covered authority and some just covered status; to gain above level 5 both areas were necessary.
- 04** Hardly any candidates homed in on the word 'meaningless' in the statement and many limited their discussion as to whether scripture was the word of God.

### Question 3 *Aspects of Christian worship*

- 05** Very few candidates answered this question. As with the previous question, some seemed to cover one area rather than the two asked for i.e. the role of the clergy and not the status or vice versa; "denominations" in Christianity were not clearly understood.
- 06** Candidates seemed to ignore the word 'vital' in the evaluation part of this question. Weaker candidates offered little knowledge or understanding of the work of the ordained ministry.

### Question 4 *A Christian way of life; initiation, marriage and death*

- 07** It was pleasing to see some knowledge of liturgical practice alongside some good references to original sin as part of the examining of beliefs associated with infant baptism. There were also some clear references to the admission to the community of faith.
- 08** Some candidates thought that it was wrong to baptise babies because they don't have any say in the matter. Moreover, they might feel later in life that they have been harmed. That said, many candidates were able to address the issue of whether it was a commitment on the part of the parents to bring up the child in a certain way. There were limited references to grace or salvation, or indeed to 'Believer's Baptism'.

## **Section B Judaism**

Question 5 was the most popular in this section of the paper; few attempted Question 6.

### **Question 5 *God and his people***

**09** Most candidates who answered this question responded well and were extremely competent in the way they dealt with both the 'chosen people' and the covenant. A few candidates offered quite brilliant responses to this question, with reference to Abraham, God working through history and how God will never abandon the Jews entirely whilst responding to the formal covenants with Abraham and then Moses offering a thorough demonstration of the nature of the two way covenant. The quality of some of the answers revealed a very thorough treatment of the topic. Clearly a favourite area for many candidates on this section of the paper.

**10** Some candidates were able to approach this by discussing some of the periods in Jewish history when it would seem that God was not with his people, like the Babylonian exile and the Holocaust, before balancing their argument with evidence from repeated narratives in the Bible of God acting on behalf of his people.

### **Question 6 *Scripture***

**11** Few candidates attempted this question. Those that focused on Jewish worship scored well, whereas just to comment on how scripture is used in Judaism generally did not access the higher levels.

**12** There were some interesting and contrasting responses, with the rules of scripture being cited as being there for a reason, running alongside the argument that these scriptures are old and not relevant for the modern era.

### **Question 7 *Aspects of worship and festivals: Shabbat, Yom Kippur and Pesach***

**13** The Yom Kippur question was done very well by most candidates. Both beliefs and practices, what they symbolise (and differences between Reform and Orthodoxy were well known). Answers were characterised by clarity, focus and direction. This proved to be a very accessible question.

**14** It was good to see some assessment of the place of communal confession and there were a few sophisticated responses to this question. Indeed, better responses understood the weight of tradition that many see as part of the 'package' that comes with Yom Kippur, showing how it can do a person good to reflect on where they might have gone wrong in life, contrasting with a very real sense that this is an outmoded practice for Jews who lead busy lives today. Curiously, few made the point about synagogues having the highest rate of attendance during Yom Kippur.

### **Question 8 *Styles of Judaism: Orthodox and Reform beliefs and practices***

**15** A straightforward question for most candidates. Several practices were referred to, such as rabbi giving a sermon on Shabbat, Bar Mitzvahs, use of tallit, ark and bimah with references to ancient Hebrew too.

**16** Candidates scored well on this question in the main. Common ideas included the role of women in Judaism being determined by the Torah, contrasting with the full and active part many see women play in Progressive Judaism, suggesting greater equality.

## **Section C Islam 1 The Way of Submission**

This was, as in previous exam sessions, by far the most popular section of the paper, with Questions 9 and 10 being the most popular.

### **Question 9 *The Qur'an***

**17** The difficulty for some candidates on this question was that they did not maintain a focus on worship, and wrote about the Qur'an in general terms. A surprising number thought that the Qur'an is treated as an object of worship. The more satisfactory responses to this question referred to prayer at home, public and private prayer, reading, sermons and use during worship at Ramadan. Some candidates were content to mention just a list of points without much elaboration, whereas the command word was 'examine'. Although examiners accepted a broad interpretation of worship, some candidates simply lost any focus on worship by describing other uses and contexts.

**18** Most answers to this evaluation question were good. Almost all candidates said that the Qur'an did not always tell you how to do things and pointed to the use of Hadith and the Sunnah as sources of information. A surprising number of candidates seemed to think that it is all a matter of acquiring information and being told what to do. Some just talked about what it meant to live a good life in Islam. Stronger candidates looked at the status of the Qur'an as the word of God, countered perhaps by the role of the Ulema or Imam to counter the claim. It was pleasing to see some candidates explore references to modernist movements in Islam which might challenge or reject the value of the hadith and hence the traditional understanding of Shari'a, perhaps against the suggestion by some of a need for an interpretation of the Qur'an in the modern age.

### **Question 10 *The Five Pillars***

**19** Most candidates who responded to this question were well-informed about these two Pillars of Faith. Some took 'significance' to mean how important they were for Muslims – as evidenced by the fact that people perform them. It is timely here to remind both teachers and students that if a question contains two aspects such as this one, candidates will not be able to achieve above level 5 if they do not cover both in their response. Although discussion about Zakah was often shorter in length than Hajj, this was not a problem here as long as the two aspects were covered. That said, this appeared to be a very accessible question to many candidates who had clearly learnt the Five Pillars of Faith well and in particular the two areas being tested, Zakah and Hajj.

**20** Good candidates saw that both are fully part of the Five Pillars of Faith and should be treated as such. Some candidates observed that Hajj is not obligatory. Less able candidates have a tendency to say, 'I agree with this statement because...' followed by 'I disagree with this statement because...' without finding anything a little strange about this approach. Reasoned argument appears to be second nature to some yet beyond the reach of others.

### **Question 11 *The doctrine of God***

**21** This question was not very popular with candidates. Those candidates that did respond to this question and strove to show how God's being lawgiver and judge fitted into Tawhid, often did well. Perhaps candidates were a little surer of their ground when discussing God as lawgiver rather than judge. Some candidates weaved in God as a source of law and how one is responsible to God and is therefore accountable to God. Candidates who worked in this way showed structure and organisation to their responses and scored well. As with other questions where there are two areas to cover, candidates cannot progress beyond level 5 if they only cover one aspect of a question.

**22** Candidates offered mostly competently written responses to this question with only a few slightly hamstrung by the misconception that since you can't visualise or picture God, it's impossible to say something about him. Some of the better responses talked about God being pure in spirit, not in human form and many covered the concept that God exists outside of time and creation for Muslims whilst counteracting their argument that Surah 112 describes the main attributes of God. These better responses were both balanced and thoughtful. Some candidates were a little more simplistic in their response, only looking at the 99 beautiful names of Allah and little else.

### **Question 12 Key Beliefs**

- 23** There were some candidates who did not really answer the question but focussed on beliefs about the afterlife. A frequent response seemed to be that it is only fear of punishment that makes people behave decently. Some weaker responses just stated what akhirah was about and did not focus on the implications of a belief in akhirah. Most candidates said that angels do a lot of recording and do not have free will, but were otherwise a bit hazy. Better responses covered life as a test on earth for Muslims, coupled with Muslims earning and being responsible for their own salvation. There were many details offered about angels being present in all time and who are seen by specially chosen people.
- 24** Some candidates made some excellent points about the limitations of empiricism. Other candidates were content to say that just because we didn't encounter something, it didn't follow that it did not exist. Hardly any discussed what impact belief in angels would have on people now. The consensus was that as belief in angels is fundamental, rejection of angels would entail rejection of the authority of the Qur'an. This question did appear to provide some difficulty for the less able candidates, who often struggled to grasp the issues that the question could raise. Usually these weak responses argued that daily life is too busy to be focussing on the idea of angels and there are other priorities for people. This is all well and good, but these candidates did not go on and develop their reasoning so scored relatively poorly. More able candidates offered some thoughtful responses suggesting that angels play a major part after death, even if Muslims live life as they want to, and they placed stress on the angel Jibrail visiting Muhammad on Mount Hira.

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