

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit 4B Topic I *Religious Fundamentalism*

Example of Candidate's Response



**GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION
ADVANCED LEVEL**



**RELIGIOUS STUDIES UNIT 4B
Religious Fundamentalism**

RST4B

EXAMPLE OF CANDIDATE'S RESPONSE

For this paper you must have:

- a 12 page answer book.

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions

- Use black ink or ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book.
The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is **RST4B**.
- Choose **one Section** only.
- Answer **one** question.

Information

- The maximum mark for this paper is 75.
- The marks for questions are shown in brackets.
- In each question, part (a) tests your knowledge and understanding, while part (b) tests your skills of reasoning and evaluation.
- You will be marked on your ability to use English, to organise information clearly and to use specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

RST4B Topic I *Religious Fundamentalism*

- 1 (a) Examine the reasons for the growth of religious fundamentalism in the 20th century.

(45 marks)

AO1

Candidate Response

Fundamentalism begins in Christianity in America at the beginning of the twentieth century with the publication of *The Fundamentals* in 1909 there were twelve volumes and they consisted of a series of articles which set out the central ideas and issues for the movement which later became called fundamentalists based upon those who accepted or adhered to the ideas found in the *Fundamentals*. The funding for the publication of the *Fundamentals* did not last long and thus in 1917 the Bible Institute of Los Angeles published a cheaper four volume version which contained all the essential points.

Whilst there was no single founder or even group of people involved nevertheless the movement clearly began in Protestant churches in America many from the Baptist and Presbyterian background. At the heart of the *Fundamentals* lies opposition to the Social Gospel which was seen to be a liberalising and secularising of the Christian message. Secondly there was the acceptance of Darwinism which was seen to be an attack upon the authority of scripture and finally there was the acceptance of the development of higher biblical criticism. The supporters of the movement regarded scripture as the central revelation and authority for all Christianity and thus they believed that this is where the early Christian church began and then gradually moved away from this hence the Reformation when once again Christians were reminded of the supremacy of scripture. Thus they saw their movement as a further reminded of the need for Christians to keep to the scriptures and not to attempt to reform or re interpret them.

Interestingly the *Fundamentals* have a strong emphasis upon the deity of Jesus Christ whom they see as God in a revelation to mankind and this becomes significant for them as they develop the need for salvation and how this was achieved through the crucifixion. Following from these two ideas there came the requirement that Christians must accept the literal resurrection of Jesus and then the acceptance of the literal Second Coming. All of this was seen to be presented in the Christian scriptures, which must be regarded as the infallible inspired word of God.

In a way the content becomes an explanation for the growth of Fundamentalism in that the movement saw the need to retain the essential features of Christianity against what they regarded as the corruption of those essential features through the development of Christian thinking, a proportion of which from the perspective of the Fundamentalists arose from the rejection of notion that scripture was the infallible inspired word of God or in some cases a different understanding of what is meant by inspired. At the heart of much that the Fundamentalists developed was and remains the idea that scripture has the final and absolute authority in all aspects of Christianity.

It is probably this feature more than any other that was and remains attractive to people. This approach to religion provides people with an absoluteness which they find attractive if scripture is the absolute word of God and if there is no other authority to challenge scripture then there is a certainty which allows for a simple approach to faith. There is only one step required and that is the step to accept that scripture is just what the Fundamentalist claims, having taken this step then all other things follow in that the scripture is then shown to provide all that is needed to live the religious life. The other approaches which the fundamentalists rejected and wrote against undermine this approach. Higher biblical criticism, for example, challenges the very notion that scripture can really have an absolute authority since it seeks to demonstrate that there are different authors and different editors who contribute towards the scripture; Form, Redaction and Literary criticism all seem to point to the idea that the scripture cannot be the Word of God and thus cannot be given full and final authority. There needs to be others like the church which might have greater authority since the church helps to determine what is to be accepted from the different styles of criticism and what is to be rejected. A similar problem clearly arose with the development of Darwinism, the concept of evolution seems to reject the Genesis accounts of the creation and at best demand that the accounts should be regarded as myth. Once again the same pattern of undermining the authority of the scripture is brought about.

Issues in the Christian church concerning the virgin birth, the deity of Jesus and the resurrection accounts all focus upon the same point, that if they are rejected then the authority of the scripture must be challenged since all these ideas are firmly rooted in the scriptures. What are referred to as liberal Christians are those who may be prepared to say that the literal understanding found in the scriptures need to be rejected in order that mankind in the twentieth century which wishes to accept science must be able to see a rational, scientific explanation for the recorded event or be forced to reject it altogether. Thus for the scientist there cannot be a bodily resurrection since in scientific terms it is not possible for a crucified body to be brought back to life and so there are different ideas about what the New Testament might mean by the claim that Jesus was resurrected, was it a spiritual resurrection and the appearances were of a spiritual body to ideas that the accounts were written much later when the Christian church wanted to express its beliefs about Jesus as Son of God and the resurrection does this more than other accounts.

It is generally accepted that the term Fundamentalist has been applied to people from other religious traditions who also seek to establish the absolute authority in their scripture and who reject the authority of others if they claim to be able to supersede the scriptures.

Commentary

In this case, the candidate has chosen to tackle the question from the roots of fundamentalism in Christianity, of course it could have tackled the question very differently by looking at fundamentalism across religions. This is, thus, a 'depth' approach. The candidate keeps tightly to the question and the points are well expressed, but supporting material is not always fully developed to allow the answer to be placed at Level 7.

Level 6 (38 marks)

(b) 'Anyone who takes their religion seriously has got to be a fundamentalist.'

Evaluate this view with reference to the two fundamentalist movements you have studied.

(30 marks)**AO2****Candidate Response**

It would certainly seem to be the case that someone claiming to be a fundamentalist would be someone who takes their religion seriously. Even if one were to assume that not all religious people do take their religion seriously it is not unreasonable to say that someone who chooses to accept or move into to an aspect of their religion which is not exactly main-stream must mean that they are taking their religion seriously since they are taking a stance which moves them into a separate group within the wider embrace of the religion and this would probably not happen if the person was not carefully considering their religion. Fundamentalism also requires that one understands and accepts the absolute authority of the scriptures, again a decision which has to be taken. But the issue here is also whether taking religion seriously means that one must become a fundamentalist. In almost all religious groups which have become labelled as fundamentalist are minorities within the religion and thus if this statement were to be correct it would mean that the majority of people involved in any particular religion do not take their religion seriously since they are not fundamentalists and this clearly is not the case. However there is some evidence that those who are fundamentalists can sometimes adopt a view which might well suggest that they are indeed the only people who take the religion seriously.

Chabad Lubavitch is an Hassidic group within Judaism which is often considered to be Fundamentalist although within Judaism this would not necessarily be the case. Orthodox Judaism generally maintains that it continues the appropriate traditions and practices which mean that it is indeed Orthodox and thus the concept of fundamentalist is almost alien. However, when we consider the Chabad Lubavitch movement we can see why they might be regarded as fundamentalist. The group maintains that it represents true Hasdic Judaism with the importance of the Rebbe well established and the strong emphasis upon Messianism. Interestingly many of the Chabad Lubavitch activities are focused upon bringing Jews back into true Jewish practice and they have successfully used modern techniques for contacting Jews who have lapsed and then encouraging them to return to their Jewish roots and begin practising Judaism again. In this sense it would be true to say that the Chabad Lubavitch do indeed consider that Jews should take their religion seriously and they do not accept that Judaism is simply another race of people who can choose to live as they wish and much of Judaism is simply cultural expression and can be accepted or rejected accordingly. Generally, however, the Chabad Lubavitch do not criticise other Jewish religious groups and thus they do not necessarily suggest that Jews who choose to take their religion seriously must join them. Nor do they seek to suggest that the Hasidic approach toward Judaism is the only true style of Judaism, rather their efforts are much more focused upon the non-practising Jew and it would generally be true to say that this movement invests more time and effort upon seeking out the lapsed Jew than any other group or style of Judaism.

If we turn to consider the Plymouth Brethren, a group within Christianity which is often referred to as a fundamentalist group we can see that they more readily see themselves as people who take their religion seriously as opposed to many Christians who by implication do not. The central rationale for this thinking lies with the belief that the Plymouth Brethren are living and acting according to the New Testament. They clearly see the New Testament as their only source of authority and reject all others. Thus, for example they do not have a clerical system other than the Elder or Deacon as referred to in the New Testament, they adhere to the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Thus the Elder or Deacon is sometimes seen only as someone who has the time or expertise to carry out certain functions rather than someone having a special authority granted to them. The role of women in the movement is another illustration of how they maintain that they are adhering to the practices established in the New Testament. Following references largely found in the Pauline material women are expected to remain silent during worship and they should have their heads covered. Thus in some meetings there will be seats at the back of the meeting room for 'loaners' that is any women to come to the meeting without head covering. The Plymouth Brethren subscribed to ideas surrounding 'the rapture' and they also tend toward the idea of only those practising true Christianity being those who will be 'saved' and they do have a very clear view that their practices are indeed true Christianity based exclusively upon the New Testament.

Commentary

A good introduction in the first paragraph. The subsequent presentation of the two movements is equally well done and accurate. Whilst the candidate does seek to relate the material to the question there should be more focus upon 'having to be a fundamentalist'.

There is no drawing together of the discussion towards the end of the essay, the candidate seems to simply stop after tackling Plymouth Brethren. Had there been a drawing the material back into the discussion set out by the question it would have moved the response upon a level without much difficulty.

Level 5 (23 marks)