



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

Religious Studies

RSS10

(Specification 2060)

**Unit K World Religions 2: Christianity, Judaism,
Islam *The Way of Submission***

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

In general, as in previous examination series, most students had been entered for and responded to questions on the Islam section of the paper. Knowledge and understanding were of a very high order though students should concentrate on exactly what the question is asking rather than rehearse a standard response to a particular question that they would have liked to have seen on the paper. Evaluation responses seemed to be a little stronger in both structure and content than in January 2011. It may be timely to remind students to number questions clearly, to keep their writing style as legible as possible, in order to ensure that revision spans all areas of the specification but, above all, to not try to fit old answers that may have been prepared earlier to new questions.

Section A Christianity

There were very few responses to this section of the paper. Questions 1 and 4 were the most popular.

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

01 There were few sophisticated answers to this question and those that responded did so by being a little vague about the precise meaning of the doctrine. Some tended to say that Christian beliefs about the Trinity express a single reality having three different aspects before proceeding to give an account of the three persons as if three different people were meant. Although there were few references to patristic developments, the better answers did consider the debate about the divinity and the humanity of Jesus.

02 Most were able to provide some general reflections about the rationality of faith. A few of these saw the point of the statement but confined themselves to observations like 'a triangle has three sides'. Surprisingly, few mentioned that if God is all-powerful.

Question 2 *Christian scriptures: nature and purpose*

03 There were very few answers to this question. The few that did respond tended to look mostly at the traditional divisions of books such as law, writings and history, yet gave little exemplification in their responses to gain the higher level marks.

04 There were slightly better responses from students in the second part of the question. The few that responded suggested that Christian scriptures come from so long ago that it is difficult to see how they can be relevant today and then counteracted this statement with the view that the word of God will always be relevant for Christians.

Question 3 *Aspects of Christian worship*

05 Many responses did not refer to the Last Supper with some being very generalised in themselves. Hardly any responses showed an understanding of what transubstantiation means or is trying to express. It would be good to see answers that show some understanding of any doctrinal differences because most responses lacked depth and were relatively brief.

06 On the whole students seemed to write about the contradictions in different views about the significance of bread and wine and some responded, appropriately, that beliefs about the Eucharist are right for the people concerned.

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

07 It is a pity to have to report that this question was not well done. Some in fact confined themselves to attempts at descriptions of funeral services and burials and said hardly anything about beliefs. Here we have a question with two aspects, beliefs **and** practices, and students must refer to both to achieve the higher levels even though references do not have to be of equal depth.

08 A typical response from students who followed on from their response to 07 was to write that 'one's whole life should be a preparation for death, though on the other hand, if death is the end, then there is no point.' There seemed to be a lack of specificity from a few students in the analysis but some did discuss the angle of 'vital'. Some balance in analysis was evident from students who understood this question better, but some responses did not access above Level 3 because of a lack of depth.

Section B Judaism

Questions 5 and 8 were the most popular in this section of the paper.

Question 5 *God and his people*

09 Most students who answered this question responded well and covered in their responses a number of ideas about God in the Jewish faith. No students seemed to misread the question and the best answers discussed the covenants and how God has 'written himself into the Torah'. Some explored the idea of God working in history and a belief in salvation history which was very creditworthy. There were also some excellent responses with a thorough examination of the Jewish concept of God as found in the Shema. The quality of some of the answers revealed a very thorough treatment of the topic, which was pleasing.

10 Some students tended to overlap their material a little too much from 09. Most were fine, although it must be impressed upon students that they do not have to come down hard on one side or the other to access the higher levels. Most said that God will never abandon his people and faith is maintained even in very dark times whilst contrasting both the exile and the holocaust as potentially showing God had abandoned his people and was therefore not to be considered as merciful.

Question 6 *Scripture*

Only one answer was seen to this question.

Question 7 *Aspects of worship and festivals*

13 Most students, if not all, really knew about beliefs and practices and what they symbolise regarding Shabbat, which is encouraging to see. Most responses centred on the commands in the Torah with regard to Shabbat and most responses about practices talked about preparations, Kiddush and Shabbat services. The better responses discussed both Orthodox and Reform practices though answers could achieve the highest levels without doing so. It is timely here also to remind students to look out for any questions with two commands such as this one (beliefs **and** practices) where both must be responded to (not necessarily in the same depth) to access the higher levels. This proved to be a fairly accessible question.

14 Better responses understood the key word of 'only' in the statement and responded accordingly. Generally though, some students did not fully grasp the nature of this evaluation question and appeared to struggle with the issue of what is meaningful to Jews regarding Shabbat. Answers lacked depth and often vague ideas were offered with little discussion. Few responses seemed to say anything about how practices both in the home and in the synagogue perhaps complement each other.

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

- 15 The role and status of women in Judaism always seem popular with AS students and so it proved to be with this question. Two aspects were asked for, the role **and** status, and though there is obvious overlap, students needed to cover both in some way, shape or form to access the higher levels. Competent, detailed and diligent responses characterised the knowledge and understanding offered by students in their responses to this question, and they were obviously well prepared in the main.
- 16 Some students misread the nature of this evaluation question and went into general differences between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. These answers hit some marks almost by default. The better responses discussed how women can and do play a full, active and equal role whilst acknowledging that there are still some restrictions for women in Reform synagogues. Equally, the better responses looked more in depth at women's roles in the home and decided there was not too much distinction to be made here.

Section C Islam 1 *The Way of Submission*

This was, as in previous examination series, by far the most popular section of the paper, with questions 9 and 10 again being the most popular questions. There were few 'poor' scripts – most were satisfactory or above – but fewer outstanding scripts than in previous series.

Question 9 *The Qur'an*

- 17 There were some comprehensive and intelligent answers to this question, though there were more weak responses than usual and many very general responses. Students were obviously not expecting this slant on a question for the Qur'an. It almost appeared as if they had a pre-existing answer that they tried to fit into this question. In most cases it didn't seem to work that well. Source of law for most meant religious law and few gave specific examples. 'The Qur'an is a complete guide to life and contains all the answers we need', 'The Qur'an is the basis of Sharia in Saudi Arabia, where thieves are severely punished and adulterers stoned' seemed to be regular themes. Sometimes it was a case of trying to work out what students were implying in their response. It was a testing question for many and this 'angle' was not expected. Some students overlooked the connection with Shari'ah and many looked at the social aspects of the Qur'an rather than the source of law aspects.
- 18 This question was well received by students, who in the main produced satisfactory responses with discussion for and against coupled with a conclusion. At the top end, some continued the theme of law in Islam by suggesting that the Sunnah and hadith work alongside the Qur'an as sources of law, though to look at other sources of law was not a requirement of the question. Better answers argued that interpretations should be informed by the Qur'an rather than read into it. There was nothing about the force of cultural traditions in creating a community. Others considered the role of the Ulama and the Imam and most responded with the argument that a modern day view of the world showed a need for interpretation. There were few outstanding responses and most were very similar in content and length.

Question 10 *The Five Pillars*

- 19 This was another popular question and produced some thoughtful responses. That said, the stress on the Umma in the question was sometimes left until the end, which did not produce the best responses and in a few cases too much background meant the focus of the question was lost. Weaker answers merely gave a summary of the Five Pillars, though in general terms it was obviously a question that was well received.

20 Solid responses were achieved by the majority. The emphasis on 'good' seemed to be lost in the weaker answers and this also tended to produce a response that again went through the Five Pillars one by one. The better answers stressed the importance of right intention and observed that you might be following the pillars for purely selfish reasons. They also considered how the Five Pillars are the basis of all Islam and they all have spiritual significance and this was counter argued by other, important aspects of Islam, such as family life, the Qur'an, greater jihad and the like. At the very top end it was good to see a few answers mention the importance of niyyah (intention) in a Muslim's life.

Question 11 *The doctrine of God*

21 This seemed to be a harder question for some students, with the 'implications' word as the focus of the question being missed in some cases and often a response about tawhid was a detailed description. Effective answers included appropriate examples related to a Muslim's life.

22 This evaluation question appeared to be a little more awkward for some, and some were not sure how to respond at all. A few of the stronger responses brought in wider examples from other religions but these were few and far between. A discussion of the Muslim way of life appeared the norm without the emphasis on One God. Oddly very few discussed how this was the most fundamental belief a Muslim has, and only a handful discussed the concept of submission in Islam. On the counter-argument side, a few of the more able answers did discuss responsibility in a Muslim's life coupled with purpose, balance and maybe even simplicity and it is these aspects of one's life that really make a Muslim.

Question 12 *Key beliefs*

23 There were no serious issues seen in response to this question. Answers included detailed and appropriate examples about Risalah. Some of the weaker answers gave a lot of background information on the prophets and especially with Muhammad and lost the focus of the question. Messenger rather than 'warner' came up for many students in their responses, but very few recalled the notion that every nation has been sent a prophet according to Islam alongside the role of prophets, though messages given by angels were relevant and included by many. Answers in the main were of a decent standard.

24 This was responded to well and there are no real issues to raise. Words and meaning were debated and students did not seem to experience problems with the wording of the question. It was good to see a few debating the textual integrity of the Qur'an and maybe some of the perceived contradictions with the general agreement Muslims have about the Qur'an and how Imams can explain the contents to their fellow believers.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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