



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

Religious Studies

RST4A

(Specification 2060)

**Unit 4A Topic I Life, Death and Beyond
Topic II Perceptions of Ultimate Reality
Topic III Religious Experience**

Report on the Examination

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General comments

There were some outstanding scripts, with a number scoring maximum marks, and many instances of well-prepared students who were able to respond to their chosen question with appropriate evidence and examples. There were also very good scripts which aimed to impress through the sheer quantity of information that was presented in response to the AO1 questions, but some of these scripts lacked the discrimination to make them excellent or did little more than summarise information rather than unpacking it in any way. There were some examples of prepared answers which students tried, not always successfully, to apply to the question set and some answers which tackled only part of the question set, suggesting that the students had not analysed the question sufficiently before starting. A very few students attempted more than one question on the paper, so wasting time.

Section A: Life Death and Beyond

There were full mark answers to each part of each question in this section.

Question 1

01 This was a very open question and a broad interpretation of the phrase ‘value of human life’ was accepted. Many students wrote about the importance of this life as well as about the value or worth of an individual human being, but in weaker answers students tended to drift between these two themes without making their focus entirely clear. The best answers to this question were well-focused. Some showed clear awareness that there are different views about how human beings acquire value and why some human beings may be considered more valuable than others, and contrasted such ideas as ‘intrinsic’ and ‘instrumental’ value. Some general answers included much about the nature of life, only some of which was made relevant.

02 The best answers to this question reflected on ways in which such views may acquire relevance and evaluated some religious views accordingly. Many showed, for example, that some religious views underpin or are reflected in society’s laws while others are increasingly rejected. There was some excellent discussion of both abortion and euthanasia in this context, although some failed to acknowledge that there were different views within religion on these issues. In most answers there was clear recognition that religious views have relevance for some religious people, and some very clear examples were used. In contrast, in some weaker answers, students wrote generally about whether religion had relevance, and paid little attention to the question asked.

Question 2

03 This was, marginally, the more popular question in this section. Many students showed that they could range widely and dealt with both religious and secular views of both death and beyond death, but some did not deal with each of the aspects. The best answers focused on the ideas they wished to present, or points they wished to make, and provided examples in support. In contrast, weaker answers were often little more than a summary of views, albeit, in many cases, a well-informed summary.

04 Many took this as a debate about what the purpose of life may be, but some also usefully considered whether life could be said to have a purpose. Some assumed that people who did not believe in an afterlife would automatically reject this view, others that dying well, as opposed to living well, appeared to be a goal for some secular thinkers as well as for some religious believers. There were some effective references to martyrdom – both political and religious in this context.

Section B: Perceptions of Ultimate Reality

Question 3

This was the more popular question in this section and there were a good number of full mark answers to both parts of the question.

05 Students explored a range of ideas about the relationship between humanity and God/Ultimate Reality and, in many cases, illustrated these ideas very effectively. There was, however, some unnecessary repetition, with the same point being illustrated several times. Some explanations of the idea that humanity is predestined lacked focus and discussed at length whether belief in predestination was consistent with belief in God. Some explanations of the idea that humanity is dependent on God were rather confused, muddling different ideas about what being dependent may mean.

06 There were some excellent answers here, although there was a slight tendency for students to change the question and argue whether religion in general, rather than belief in God in particular, has a positive or negative impact on the way in which people live. Some students looked at the way belief in God affected other beliefs, rather than its impact on the way people live, and only some students considered the impact of atheism, although there was a clear opportunity to include it. The best answers considered a variety of ways in which beliefs about God have affected, or are believed to affect, the way people live, and evaluated the statement accordingly.

Question 4

07 Not all the students covered each aspect of this question. A number had little, or nothing, to say about how understanding of God is expressed in art, and even when it was mentioned there was often only a very limited use of examples. Other answers lacked examples of the use of religious language to express an understanding of God, even where a reasonable understanding of various theories of religious language was shown. Some answers both explained how symbols work and, using good examples, illustrated how they could express ideas about God, but in other cases it was not made clear what ideas about God /Ultimate Reality the chosen symbols, e.g. the cross, actually expressed.

08 Some good understanding of why religious language is considered meaningless by some was shown but this was not sufficient for a full response to the question. Some of the best answers challenged the idea that religious language is automatically meaningful for believers and considered how far religious experience is necessary for an understanding of the word 'God'. Others looked at dialogue between people from different faiths, or between believers and non-believers to challenge the claim.

Section C: Religious Experience

Question 5

There were some full mark answers to each part of each question in this section and this was the more popular question.

09 The best answers to this question focused on the meaning of the term religious experience. Some very well-informed answers summarised the main characteristics of each of the different types of experience but barely considered what made them 'religious' which limited the marks that could be awarded. In the best answers, ideas from William

James, Caroline Franks Davies and David Hay were commonly referenced in the best answers, along with Otto's idea of the numinous.

10 Some students only debated whether it was difficult to take religious experiences seriously, which was not a full response to the question asked, but many did go on to debate how far this affected the way people responded to religion as a whole. Many were able to point to different types of believers, only some of whom see religious experiences as an asset to religion today, and most were able to refer to secular thinkers who appear to find religious experiences an obstacle to taking religion seriously. Freud and Richard Dawkins were commonly referred to in this context.

Question 6

11 Some of the best answers traced the link between specific religious experiences and specific examples of religious practice and good behaviour very carefully, while weaker answers tended to state that there was a link between the two but did not explain it. Many referred to the role of Muhammad's experiences in Islam, Moses' experiences in Judaism and Christianity and the enlightenment of the Buddha, but only some commented on the nature and assumed authority of these experiences or the way they have been interpreted and used alongside other sources in order to establish laws or guidelines.

12 There were some excellent answers to this question. Many distinguished between the influence of religious experiences within a specific religion and their proven validity. They showed, for example that those who accepted the religious experiences of their own tradition were often quick to dismiss such experiences within others. Many contrasted the attitude of secular scientists to such experiences with the faith stance of believers and some pointed to the role of conversion experiences as establishing their own 'validity' by means of their impact on the individuals concerned. Many referred to the 'tests' for religious experience, including the threefold test of St Teresa of Avila, and Swinburne's principles of credulity and testimony. Only some then went on to evaluate those tests, and treatments of Swinburne's principles was often confused.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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