

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit 4A Topic II *Perceptions of Ultimate Reality*

Example of Candidate's Response



**GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION
ADVANCED LEVEL**



**RELIGIOUS STUDIES UNIT 4A
Perceptions of Ultimate Reality**

RST4A

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 **RST4A**.
- 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.

RST4A Topic II *Perceptions of Ultimate Reality*

- 1 (a) **Examine religious ideas about the relationship between God / Ultimate Reality and the physical world.**

(45 marks)

AO1

Candidate Response

For many religions the definition of God is valuable when considering the relationship between God and the physical world. If we consider Christianity, main stream Christianity bases its beliefs about God upon the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament there is a clear idea of monotheism, that there is only one God and there can be no others. The One God thus becomes all powerful, all knowing, creator, omnipotent, indeed Anselm's definition of God that than which no greater can be conceived seems entirely appropriate. But as the Old Testament unfolds there is also a clear view that God can be directly involved in the history of mankind and that God can also have a relationship with both individuals, like Abraham, and with whole peoples, like the Jews. In the New Testament there are two major issues, the first is that further ideas about God and the relationship between mankind are developed and there is a strong emphasis upon the loving nature of God and the second and in a way the most significant is that Jesus is God in human form and thus all that is recorded about Jesus and what he says and what he does becomes revelation of God.

Some philosophers claim that if God really is eternal, beyond time and transcendent then it is not possible for him to interact with the physical time based world. A similar problem arises with the difficulties over evil, if God is thoroughly good then how can He allow for evil to exist let alone tolerate it in the world. For the philosopher the issue seems to be if God has all the characteristics which are attributed to Him how can He have any thing to do with the physical world which is so imperfect. Christianity clearly rejects this, indeed some aspects of Christian thinking bind God even more closely to the world, the most obvious example of this would be Process Theology.

Christianity sees God as the creator of the physical world and the accounts in Genesis make this explicit, 'In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth...' Thus at the very beginning God is intimately involved in the physical world, shaping and forming it and the end of the first account in Genesis it says that, 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good.' Later in Genesis we are told that God was directly involved in the physical world in that in the garden Adam and Eve 'heard the sound of God walking in the garden...' Genesis then accounts for a separation between God and mankind because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. But despite this the distance does not appear to prevent God from acting within the physical world. The revelation of the Law to Moses at Sinai is an excellent example of God being involved in the physical world and the writer of exodus indicates the very presence of God at Sinai describing the presence as being signified by thunder, lightning and smoke. Moses sees the back of God and having been in God's presence has to have his face covered. Again later at the time of the Israelite attacks upon Canaan we are given clear examples of God's involvement in the physical world in the book of Joshua we are told that when two men broke the ban after the battle of Jericho the Israelites were defeated when they first attacked the city of Ai and Joshua is told that the reason for this is that God was no longer with the Israelite army because the ban at Jericho had not been observed. We are therefore given two major ideas about God and the physical world, the first being that on occasions God can actually appear in the world and secondly that he can be intimately involved in the world and actually affect what happens in the world.

It is from this context that Christianity then goes on to develop the ultimate involvement of God in the physical world with Jesus as the son of God. There are various indications about this from the baptism of Jesus where a voice says according to Mark, 'Thou art my Son, my beloved, on thee my favour rests.' And then later at the transfiguration Luke records a voice which says, 'This is my son, my chosen; listen to him.' Ideas about the person of God are slowly developed in the Christian Church, thus the last gospel to be written, John's, is much clearer about the person of Jesus, starting with the Prologue where John writes, 'When all things began the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was.' Towards the end of the gospel John writes, 'I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.' Later still the Christian church firmly stated its ideas about Jesus in the Creeds, the Nicene Creed from the fourth century says of Jesus, 'I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten...'

Whilst the life of Jesus is seen by the Christian church as a revelation of God to the people, the Christian church has also established an on going presence and involvement of God in the physical world through its development of the work of the Holy Spirit, perhaps worked from the idea we find in John's gospel of the Paraclete. In his gospel John writes, '...but your Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will call to mind all that I have told you.' The Christian church sees the Holy Spirit as the ongoing work of God in the physical world and thus from the time of Pentecost onwards the Christian church maintains that God is fully involved in the physical world through the Holy Spirit and many churches and their practices demonstrate this, from Baptism where the person is believed to receive the Holy Spirit through to ideas about the election of a new Pope in the Roman Catholic Church where it is believed that the convocation of Cardinals are influenced by the Holy spirit in their election of a new Pope.

Commentary

An example of a candidate answering the question by adopting the 'depth' approach, which is carefully established in the opening paragraph. The candidate is well informed and its use of supporting material is quite sophisticated. There is a real sense of a deep understanding of Christianity, which is often deftly expressed, sometimes supported by either text or appropriate scholarly understandings.

Level 7 (45 marks)

- (b) **Assess the view that the relationship between humanity and God / Ultimate Reality as depicted in religion is best described as a relationship between a slave and a master.**

(30 marks)

AO2

Candidate Response

The idea of slave and master suggests that a master owns a slave and the slave has no rights and really no individuality since the slave is entirely controlled by the master. It might be possible to see how such an idea came about with regard to religion and ideas about God. Put simply it suggests that God is so superior and so in control especially as the creator that mankind can be little more than something which God controls and manipulates. For many religions this is far from the truth and the idea of man's free will is an important feature of the nature of man. Christianity has an interesting further development of the slave concept in that it looks at the relationship between mankind and God pre the crucifixion of Jesus and suggests that man was not 'free' in that man was bound by original sin, but the crucifixion sets man free from this bondage. Paul also uses the image of slave and lack of freedom pre crucifixion and in his case he refers to the slavery imposed upon mankind by the Law and suggests that after the death and resurrection of Jesus by following Jesus' teaching mankind is free from the slavery of the Law. Given that Christianity sees Jesus as the Son of God all his teachings and actions suggest very much an entirely different relationship, between God and mankind. Again, in the gospels there is a good example of master imagery when at the last supper it is recorded that Jesus washed the feet of the disciples indicating that the master was there to serve. Thus in Christianity there seems to be a strong view that says that humankind is totally free of any control from God and that people can act as they choose, thus Christianity sees the growth of the secular world as just that. Mission work in the modern Christian church is regarded as the task to persuade people to exercise their free will in accepting Jesus and God.

However, despite this there is also a clear idea in Christianity that God is far superior to an human being and that man could never become God like thus Christian theologians often refer to an idea of God limiting himself when he engages with human beings, and the many attributes given to God also make it clear that there is a great gulf between God and mankind. But this gulf is bridged by God's acts and man's responses to God through things like prayer. If we turn to Judaism, which after all is where Christianity has its roots, the covenant relationship best examples the Jewish view of the relationship between God and the Jews. In Jewish thought the relationship that they have is different from the relationship between God and other peoples and probably regarded as one which is superior to the relationship between God and other people too. The Covenant concept is based upon an ancient form of agreement between a king and vassals, but is unique in that both sides are bound to certain actions within the covenant agreement, thus despite superiority the king still had to undertake certain actions as part of the covenant just as much as the vassal had undertakings which were equally binding.

The covenant concept thus is not like the relationship between the master and the slave, far from it. The inferior, in this case the Jewish people, are bound into the covenant and of course can equally exercise their freewill and break the covenant at any time. This is quite unlike the slave who may well disobey the master but such behaviour would not bring freedom on the contrary would more likely bring punishment. Even Islam which has a strong emphasis upon the separateness of God and the distance between God and the people nevertheless once again there is little in the Muslim view about the relationship between God and man which could be said to be based upon the master slave relationship. In the case of Islam it is the exercise of a man's freewill which leads a person to submit to the Will of God which then leads to becoming a Muslim. Both Judaism and Islam do have very clear sets of rules about behaviour and how the relationship between man and God can be strengthened by man's obedience to the rules which are set down by God, but again unlike the slave man has every opportunity to disobey and in the course of history there are plenty of examples of such disobedience.

In conclusion whilst most religions do have a view and teachings which demonstrate that God is far superior to mankind this does not lead them to conclude that the relationship between God and mankind is indeed one of master and slave. Man is accorded much freedom and although there may be dire warnings about what may happen to those who reject God, usually expressed in teachings about hell and judgment, nevertheless these in themselves exemplify the very idea that man is free to choose.

Commentary

A well focused discussion and the candidate deals well by developing the 'slave-master' theme set out by the question. Whilst a lot of the response is developed around Christianity there is sufficient depth and in this case the candidate does touch upon Judaism and Islam. It is these latter references that one might suggest the comments are a little too general. Nevertheless a good answer.

Level 7 (29 marks)