

Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit RST4A *Topic III Religious Experience*

Candidate Exemplar Work

- Candidate B



Unit RST4A *Topic III Religious Experience*

Example of Candidate's Work on Specimen Questions

- 6 (a) Examine what religions and scholars mean by revelation and conversion as types of religious experience.

(45 marks) AO1

Candidate Response

Religious experiences are one of the most remarkable aspects of religions as they are said to be supernatural occurrences which can have a huge impact on peoples' lives. The mental-event is non-empirical and consequently unreliable as evidence for the existence of God. However most religious experiences include some kind of revelation, a closeness with the Divine and usually encourage some change in life-style. A conversion experience is when the affect of a religious experience is life-changing and the person may adopt a new religious perspective on life. A revelatory experience is when a greater understanding of faith is gained during a religious experience.

Within religion revelation refers to the gaining of supreme knowledge from a supernatural entity during a religious experience. They are a significant part of many religions, and are at the basis of many laws. The two core types of revelation are propositional and non-propositional. According to Franks Davis there are five vital features of a revelation which include suddenness, briefness, an instant gain in new knowledge from an external agent, an utter trust in the external agent and ineffability. There are varying types of knowledge to be gained from a revelatory experience which include universal truths (Guru Nanak received a revelation about the name of God), new information of the present, knowledge from the future (Hildegard of Bingen foresaw the Protestant Reformation), and spiritual help. Propositional revelation is the communication of truth by God through a supernatural means and expressed as propositions. A noteworthy propositional revelation relevant in Judaism, is The Sermon on the Mount (Exodus 19-21), here God gives Divine revelation in the form of the Ten Commandments. The experience is especially important as God reveals a glimpse of himself, "Mount Sinai was altogether in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it on fire". Within Christianity (Mark 9: 2-8) there is a revelation experience where Jesus "transfigured" before his disciples and God said "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!". In the case of non-propositional revelation knowledge is not received directly from the Divine rather a superior understanding is gained after a period of reflection. It involves interpreting revelatory events in a special way, for example the prophets in the Old Testament perceived the fall of Samaria as an expression of celestial judgement on Israel.

Conversions involve a life changing religious experience afterwards gaining a religious perspective on life with an assurance in the existence of the divine. There are two main types voluntary and involuntary conversions. An involuntary conversion is usually dramatic with features of wrongness in one's life and a positive change they are then willing to make. Beforehand the individual will have no inclination they are going to undergo a religious experience and it will usually occur suddenly with the person having no control over their bodies movements. St. Paul on the Road to Damascus is an example of an involuntary conversion where a voice Jesus shouts "Saul! Saul! Why do u persecute me?" before temporarily blinding Saul. Saul later changes his name to Paul signifying a rebirth into a new Christian way of life. Conversion can also be voluntary where a person may contemplate a different way of life and then one day they abandon their old way of life in favour for a different one. An example of voluntary

conversion in recent times is the conversion of Cassius Marcellus Clay to the Nation of Islam where his name was changed to Muhammad Ali, at the time this was highly controversial and he inclined towards separation from mainstream American society, claiming "Integration is wrong". Conversions can be further sub-divided into intellectual (involving a change in the person's thinking), moral (a change in their behaviours) and social (where a new way of life is adopted).

Both revelation and conversion experiences have had an apparent affect on various cultures throughout history. This is mainly due to the outer-worldly aspect of them which captivates peoples' interest. Arguably revelations are at the very foundations of faith as such large proportion of the scriptures is written from knowledge acquired during revelatory experiences. Conversions are also likely to be the most impactful type of religious experience as by definition they are life-changing and are key way in which many religious believers have found faith.

Commentary

AO1 (45 marks)

A rather weak approach. The response is quite thin and although the question is possibly too broad, there is little focused attempt to answer it.

There should be a clear distinction between 'religious' and 'scholars' in the same way as there is between revelation and conversion.

Whilst there is an understanding of the difference between propositional and non-propositional revelation, the understanding of both is weak. The slip about Sinai being the Sermon on the Mount does not help. There is no clear view about what any religion might say about revelation.

Again with conversion there is evidence that there are different styles of revelation but beyond the involuntary, the differences are unclear. Again Jesus shouting in text message style does not help to make this a convincing answer. The final paragraph is vague and confusing and appears to add very little by way of a conclusion drawing all the different aspects of the answer together.

Level 3 (15 marks)