

## Teacher Resource Bank

GCE Religious Studies

Unit RST4B *Topic II Religion and Contemporary  
Society*

Candidate Exemplar Work



## Unit RST4B *Topic II Religion and Contemporary Society*

### Example of Candidate's Work on Specimen Questions

- 4 (a) Explain what is meant by interfaith relations and dialogue. (45 marks) AO1

#### Candidate Response

Interfaith relations is all about the way there is some sort of link between different religious faiths in the world. Interfaith dialogue is more concerned with the discussions and the debated which are taking place between different religious faiths in the world, often in a more formal context.

There are two ways of looking at interfaith relations, one is to study what is happening in a society which has people living together from a variety of faith backgrounds. The other is to look at the way faiths relate to each other on an international level and this is more often more likely to occur in the dialogue aspects.

I will firstly look at what is happening in England as a good example of a society where there is a considerable number of different faiths living alongside each other. Of course interfaith relations can be positive but they can also be negative. One well known example is the Council for Christians and Jews. This operates in areas like London, Leeds and Manchester where there is a significant Jewish population. The aim of the group is to encourage both religions to learn about each other by talking about and by observing religious practices. But there are also attempts to then find common ground between the two religions for example on moral issues like abortion. One of the major ideas behind the Council is to try and ensure that the two religious groups can live alongside side each other quite happily because there is a better understanding of why each religion is behaving in the way that it is. Sometimes in areas like London and Manchester where there is a very diverse religious population wider interfaith groups have developed, such as the one in Salford where representatives from other faiths, most notable Muslims and Hindus have joined with the Jews and Christians but in many ways the objectives are still the same.

Where this does not happen there can be major problems between different faiths which is often linked to racism. Thus in some areas everyone from India and the Middle east are seen to be Muslim and are treated as a threat to the rest of the community because of the way Muslims are associated with the bombings of the Twin towers and the London underground as well as many other smaller bombings. In these cases the interfaith relations are very poor with some seeing white English Christians being threatened and sometimes actually attacked by Muslims. Some aspects of the BNP reflect this although many Christian churches have publically stated that they do not support any of the views of the BNP and even that their members must not be members of this particular political group.

There are today very many organisations which are promoting and supporting dialogue between different religions, in the UK there are organisations like the International Interfaith Organisation of Oxford and the Interfaith Network for the UK and then there are very many worldwide organisations like the Parliament of World's Religions the World Congress of Faiths and the International Association for religious Freedom.

**Commentary**

AO1 (45 marks)

A sound introduction where the candidate explains that they wish to see a distinction between dialogue and relations and then that there are also two ways of considering relations. It is a pity that this is not adhered to throughout the essay. The next section provides a fair example of dialogue which a bit of reference to relations, although the latter is not specific enough and thus requires more depth with examples. The next paragraph referring to problems when this does not happen is irrelevant. Finally there are a few brief references to organisations like Interfaith Network but there is no attempt to develop these references or to apply them back to the question. The response is generally far too brief.

Probably mid level 3.

- (b) **'Faiths are so distinctive that they can never truly enter into dialogue with each other.'**

**Evaluate this assertion.****(30 marks)****AO2****Candidate Response**

Of course faiths are distinctive if they were not then they would not exist as separate groups. The reason that they are distinctive is that each religion claims that it has had a special revelation from God or a special insight into Ultimate Reality which means that the teaching and the messages from that particular religion are unique.

There are two factors when looking at dialogue, one is the purpose of the dialogue and the other is the claim to uniqueness made by each religion and how closely linked this is to conversion and missionary work. Some Christians believe that there is only one true religion and that is Christianity all the others are faulty in one way or another. Clearly entering into dialogue with this approach means that the only real reason for doing so is to persuade the other religions that they are imperfect and that it would be best if they all gave up and became Christians. Islam has a similar view and considers that the revelation from Allah to Muhammad is the final and most significant and again that the other religions are either completed misguided, or in the case of Christianity and Judaism are as People of the Book only partially wrong.

Some people think that because of this dialogue should be about finding a way whereby all the different religions can come together to form religion which will not have differences but a common faith and practice. Given the views of many religions this does seem to be very unlikely to happen.

It is clear that dialogue does happen and that it has been increasing during most of the twentieth century and indeed growing in the twenty-first too with organisations like the Parliament of World's Religions which began in the late nineteenth century and will be meeting this year in Melbourne.

It is true to say that religions are distinctive it depends upon what the expectation for dialogue is before we can say whether it can work or not.

### **Commentary**

AO2 30 marks

There are some interesting ideas following the first statement about why religions are distinctive. But there is little discussion around the issue of the one approach highlighted, namely mission, and the candidate does not go beyond this to consider other aspects of dialogue. Similarly the example of seeking to establish a single common religion is not debated in the context of the question and apart from this the candidate does not consider any other aspect of dialogue. Finally there are examples of where a different approach to dialogue is happening but the candidate shows little knowledge of these and does not then explore what makes these examples a success.

Probably bottom of level 3.