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## Unit 5: Religious Expression in Society

### General Comments

There was a five-fold increase in entries to this paper this year from last. The standard remains very high, with examiners gaining the clear impression that students have really enjoyed and engaged with the course. It is clear that where this is the course taught, students have gone beyond the classroom, and begun to consider ideas and concepts more widely. In the first year of the exam, teachers went beyond textbooks to look for examples, and it was pleasing to see this as a common practice this year as well. Not only that, but students themselves are individually using their own wider examples.

The most popular questions remain Religion and Art and the least popular Religion in Contemporary Society, with the other topics answered in roughly equal numbers. However, no topic has less than 50% of the candidature, suggesting this course continues to be viewed as accessible across its breadth.

In terms of religions used in the paper, this paper is about spirituality and religious ideas rather than any specific religion. However, Christian references are the most common. Other religions are referenced depending on the element of the topic, e.g. calligraphy is commonly written about from an Islamic viewpoint. There is no limit to the religions allowed to be referenced, or from which examples come.

Centres should be aware that whole questions on topics will consist of four or five parts, making up a total of 18 marks, 9 marks for AO1 and 9 for AO2. There will always be two AO2 questions, one a 3-mark question and the other a 6-mark question. Marks for individual questions for AO1 may differ from year to year, but, for each whole question, there will always be two or three questions for AO1, totalling 9 marks. Therefore any combination is possible, e.g. 2, 3, 4, or 1, 3, 5, or 3, 3, 3 etc. Whichever combination is chosen will apply to all whole questions on the paper. This enables examiners to examine the AO1 assessment objective in relation to the specification in the most appropriate way, depending on the content being examined from year to year. This is fairer to candidates. It enables technical terms, or more challenging parts of the specification to be examined appropriately and provides candidates with opportunities to write at greater length on issues where there is a greater body of knowledge or explanation available.

Last year, it was necessary to highlight AO2 (evaluative) questions as being in need of work from teachers. Candidates this year have been able to show their skills better in this aspect, but centres will find it helpful to continue to work on their candidates' ability to answer evaluatively.

In terms of AO1 questions, candidates need to be able to use examples in their answers as this will help their explanations and allow them to access the highest levels. In addition, candidates need to be given more support in developing explanations of the points they make. This will improve the marks (and hence the grades) of many candidates.

The part questions which proved the most challenging for candidates this year were almost exclusively those requiring understanding of technical language – revelation, devotion, spirituality, for example. These specific terms go across the whole specification and can be asked within any topic. It is important that time is spent ensuring that candidates recognise and understand these terms. It would help candidates to see them in every topic – it may be that they are taught as a separate block, but they should be taught as part of each topic to ensure full understanding.

## **Religion and Art**

This was the most popular topic. Most candidates had no difficulty with 01 and gained full marks. Many candidates struggled with the term ‘spirituality’ in 02 and so did not gain full marks. That said, very few were unable to pick up any marks at all. Many candidates answered this in a fairly simplistic way.

Candidates seemed to enjoy question 03 and often wrote more than was needed to gain full marks. They showed very good evaluative skills in their response. The best candidates used examples, e.g. Mohammad Ali, and the Gospel Graffiti Crew, to illustrate their ideas.

In 04, candidates were able to write well on calligraphy. The main examples used were in Islamic calligraphy, with some lesser use of Christian illuminated examples.

Candidates performed to their abilities on 05 which proved a good differentiator. The best responses were wide-ranging covering whether religious art is meaningless generally, and whether being a religious believer gives you any more insight. They also gave examples to illustrate their points.

## **Religion and Architecture**

The technical term ‘devotion’ in 06 was less of a challenge to candidates than other terms were. Given the mark for the question was only two, this proved a good way to gain marks for 85% of candidates. Where candidates fell down on 07, it was simply because they chose to write about something which could not be identified as a monument. Candidates need to have examples to work from for each of the types of each category. They may be asked about any of the types, which in this topic are – graveyard architecture, edifice, place of worship, monument, statue (of course, there are examples which can be labelled as more than one of these). Candidates had no problems with 08, with the vast majority picking up at least one mark.

Candidates found 09 accessible, though only the best candidates could explain in adequate depth why architecture is important. These candidates tended to give several reasons, using several different types of architecture, sometimes with examples. The range of responses to 10 proved interesting, as some candidates chose to tackle the problems of worshipping in the same place, whilst others the issues of difference in belief and practice. A few candidates chose to explore more secular reasoning for religions to share buildings. The best candidates did not focus on one of these aspects but wove all together to give a very rounded and coherent response.

## **Religion and Literature**

Few candidates failed to get full marks in 11; those who failed did so because they gave examples of the same type. Candidates struggled to give well-developed answers to 12, so fewer than half gained full marks. Candidates often wrote generally about literature, as opposed to this specific genre; they also didn’t focus sharply enough on how these books helped. Most candidates made a good attempt at 13, and it differentiated well. Candidates struggled with 14, with one in three getting no marks, a number of whom did not even attempt to answer. This is a question which required understanding of the key term ‘revelation’. Candidates either did not understand the term, or could not apply it to this topic. For those candidates who were able to respond well, they used examples such as the revelation of the Qur’an, and went on to discuss how literature can provoke a revelation in others. Although many candidates struggled to give strong answers on 15, few failed to accrue any marks. The best answers considered the potential quality of children’s work versus its purity / innocence; also the tradition invested in religious books and their links to God.

## **Religion and Media**

Candidates generally did well on 16, and were able to give a range of reasons why documentaries helped religious and / or non-religious viewers. Most candidates gained two marks for 17. In question 18, candidates once more struggled with the key term used i.e. 'spirituality'. The best candidates gave superb answers which made many points to argue for and against. Interestingly, a considerable number focused only on disagreeing with the statement, writing very persuasively and at length.

Those candidates who failed to get the higher levels of marks for 19 did so because they merely described the programme rather than pulling out and explaining the religious message(s) in it. Candidates should be encouraged to learn several religious messages for any example they study, as this gives more content to use in exam questions. The evaluative question 20 again differentiated well, as candidates scored across the whole range of marks available. Tellingly, most candidates did not explore the idea of what 'making fun' actually meant – this would have been a rich vein of valid ideas. A few explored the idea of regulation and censorship. Commonly, candidates suggested religious believers should just not watch these programmes!

## **Religion and Music**

Few candidates had any problem with 21. Most candidates could simply describe the religious message in one piece of music required for 22. A vast range of examples were given, showing that many candidates are now bringing their own examples to the exam, beyond what they study in lessons. This is very pleasing to see. Candidates found 23 a very straightforward question with over half gaining full marks.

Although most answers to 24 focused around Christian hymns, a few wrote about their equivalent in Hinduism and Sikhism, which was perfectly creditable. Candidates who performed best were able to show how hymns aid worship, and support the teachings as well as the atmosphere of worship. They usually made use of examples to illustrate their points. Question 25 was the best answered AO2 (6 mark) question, and candidates attained across the whole range of available marks. The best responses explored the need for music to create an atmosphere, that music helped understanding, and that music itself is a teacher; contrastingly, that music distracts, at times is irreligious (even blasphemous) and is even forbidden in some religions.

## **Religion in Contemporary Society**

This was the least popular topic. Overall, this question gave candidates more marks than any of the others they answered.

Very few candidates failed to get any marks for 26. Where candidates did not get full marks, it was usually because they failed to explain any point they made. Candidates found 27 a very straightforward question. Almost half of all candidates gained full marks on 28. Candidates found it very straightforward.

Most candidates struggled to gain more than half the available marks on 29. They could usually give simple reasons in their answer, but were then unable to explain them, and few used examples in their answers. Many candidates struggled with the term 'member of a religion', and had little to work with in relation to what this meant in practical terms. Almost 10% of candidates did not attempt question 30. It may have been the concept of 'living in a monastery' or 'greatest devotion' which affected their response. For some candidates, they

had simply run out of time on the paper – and this was the question which lost out. Many candidates gave truncated answers – again due to time issues. Those candidates who answered gained marks across the whole range. Responses tended to be restricted to focusing on living in a monastery (good or bad), and few explored other ways to show devotion.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.

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