



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies 5061

**Unit RS01 An introduction to Religion and
Human Experience**

Report on the Examination

2007 examination – January series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

RS01 An introduction to Religion and Human Experience

General Comments

Many candidates were clearly well prepared for this paper and were able to apply a wealth of relevant information to the questions set. A small minority of candidates wasted time and effort by answering all three questions on the paper, and a small but significant number produced work that was, in some parts, very difficult to read. Very few candidates appeared to run out of time for the paper as a whole, but some were clearly rushing their last answer. If they left Questions 2(b) or 3(b) till last, this may have significantly depressed their marks since there are 25 marks for these questions. Some candidates started with Question 2 or 3, so if they had to rush an answer it was to a ten mark question.

Question 1(a)

Many of the answers were directly focussed on the question and were able to score high marks because they drew on a variety of ways in which religious experience can 'inspire'. They also showed a very good judgement about the length of answer expected. In contrast, some weaker answers did not focus on 'inspire' and wrote irrelevantly about how scripture instructs or guides. Also irrelevant were explanations about the nature of religious experience, and these were sometimes quite lengthy with some candidates leaving themselves insufficient time for the rest of the paper.

Question 1(b)

Candidates clearly knew that some religious experiences were said to be 'beyond ordinary description' or ineffable, but not all were able to offer any reasons why this might be so. Some seemed to rush into the question and wrote at some length, stating that religious experiences were ineffable or even giving examples of people who had found them to be so, and only focussing on the actual question set at the end of the answer, if at all. However, many answers were excellent and focussed fully on the question asked.

Question 2(a)

There were some excellent answers to this question and, on the whole, candidates focussed their answers correctly. However, some dealt with the use of scriptures as well as their nature. As expected, some answers dealt with the different types of literature found in scriptures, others with different views about the status of that material as 'the Word of God' or human thoughts about God, and some drew on both themes.

Question 2(b)

There were many good answers to this question. Not all answers were focussed on the question, and some included material about how scriptures inspire rather than guide, or about how scriptures can be a source of belief. A very few answers seemed to ignore the AO1 demand completely and went straight into evaluation. Such answers often included a few creditable points about the use of scriptures as a guide, but rarely scored more than a few marks on this assessment objective.

The assess part of the question provoked some good answers, but some were completely one-sided and offered not even the slightest support to the idea that scriptures may be the only guide needed. A balanced answer was not required, but some attention to the 'other side' of

the argument is essential for an award of a Level 4 or a Level 5 mark. Some answers did not focus on the issue given but debated instead whether scriptures were the most important guide required. Such answers were often largely irrelevant, although incidental points of relevance to the given issue were sometimes found and given some credit.

Question 3(a)

Answers showed a high level of understanding of the features of mystical experiences as identified by a range of scholars but, in general, were less focussed or effective when dealing with the idea of religious experience. Indeed, some answers almost completely ignored the instruction to explain the meaning of 'religious experience' and so could only gain limited credit. Some of the highest scoring answers offered a definition of religious experience and then illustrated the ideas from the experiences of mystics.

Question 3(b)

Good understanding was shown of why some religious experiences lack authority, and some very pertinent examples were cited, ranging from mystics whose claims to have achieved union with God were considered blasphemous, to murderers who claimed divine sanction for their crimes. There was generally very good understanding of why some so-called religious experience may not be religious at all, and of the difficulty of verifying claims that someone has had such an experience in the first place.

The assessment part of the question attracted a good range of answers which often balanced the continuing importance of the foundational religious experiences of the religion, or those recorded in scripture, with the personal experiences of people today. The best answers referred explicitly to the relevance or otherwise of the experiences rather than just discussing their importance, or lack of it, in general.