



General Certificate of Education

Religious Studies (5061/6061)

Unit RS05 An introduction to Aspects of a Major World Faith

Report on the Examination

June examination - 2007 series

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RS05 *An introduction to Aspects of a Major World Faith*

As in previous examinations, Islam and Buddhism were the most popular options. The examination scripts revealed a wide range of ability and the questions were accessible to the full range of candidates. Most candidates approached the compulsory question well on each of the different sections, showing awareness that both the skills of knowledge and understanding were required in order to access the highest levels of the Mark Scheme. Answers to part (b) of the optional questions indicated that most candidates allocated an appropriate amount of time and attention to their responses, and also showed an awareness that the second part of the question required an evaluative approach as well as understanding and knowledge. However, it was disappointing to note that some candidates did not apportion enough time and attention to part (a) of these questions which require a longer, more thorough answer than the compulsory questions. This was true of all the sections of the paper.

Section A Buddhism

Question 1

Part (a)

The key features of Theravada Buddhism appear to be an accessible subject area for many candidates. At the top end of the ability range, candidates were able to cover a wide range of beliefs and practices and some of the better answers referred to Theravada as 'the tradition of the elders', considered monastic practice as the 'higher goal', alongside exploring, in greater depth, the teachings of the Buddha. Less able candidates simply referred to the areas of the world where Theravada is practised and to the Four Holy Truths.

Part (b)

Most candidates covered more than three ways in which Mahayana Buddhism is different to Theravada Buddhism, though they did not need to. The more able candidates covered ground connected with 'Skill in means' and the Tri-kaya exceptionally thoroughly, as well as in-depth studies related to the concept of the bodhisattva. Less able candidates still delivered some detail showing awareness that the scriptures and aspects of Buddhology are different, but ultimately some of these responses lacked depth.

Question 2

Part (a)

Candidates found this question reasonably accessible and dealt with the historical and social factors that led to the emergence of Buddhism in India in some depth. The most able candidates established a clear link between the historical and social factors, but some candidates, disappointingly, either covered only one aspect of the question or only gave one example of social and historical factors, so there was little exemplification.

Part (b)

Candidates were largely able to establish many of the religious factors that led to the emergence of Buddhism and the first part of the question was completed particularly well considering Brahmanism, the influence of asceticism and the development of different writings, and ideas about atman and yogic techniques. Some candidates experienced difficulties answering the second part of the question which required them to assess whether or not

Buddhism was different from other religious movements of the time. They were **not** asked for detailed knowledge of these movements. More able candidates could assert that Buddha's religious ideas were unique and considered aspects of meditation, referring, in particular, to nibbana and anatta as their examples. Equally, they were able to offer evidence of only Buddhism and Jainism surviving as established faiths today, from those earliest movements.

Question 3

Part (a)

This question was the more popular of the two optional questions on the Buddhism section. Many candidates knew about the nature and purpose of Vipassana meditation and provided some detail about a highly skilled mental practice of extinguishing the 'three fires' of akusala. Less able candidates either considered the 'nature' of Vipassana alone or the 'purpose' element alone, or they did not look at both aspects in enough depth to access the higher levels of the Mark Scheme. Almost all candidates referred to Samatha meditation in their answers, which could be considered as appropriate given that many believe that Vipassana meditation cannot be practised without the discipline of Samatha meditation.

Part (b)

This question was generally answered well, with most candidates recognising that meditation is crucial for developing morality and also how meditation is practised in groups. Some of the more able candidates considered meditation as a path to enlightenment and that it was vital in order to be part of the wider Sangha. The assessment element of the question elicited some interesting responses and the better of these included reference to the Mahayana views about everyone being able to achieve enlightenment whilst considering the Theravadin view that the monastic environment is the most conducive to enlightenment.

Section B Christianity

Question 4

Part (a)

More able candidates highlighted a range of relevant examples of sources of authority in the Roman Catholic Church, particularly concentrating on the role of scripture, priests and bishops. Some less well-developed responses talked only of papal authority.

Part (b)

This question was less well answered than anticipated. The better responses looked at the issue of scriptural authority as the sole source in some churches and the importance of reason, experience and tradition. Others also considered ministers and elders and their respective roles. Many candidates produced generalised responses which, unfortunately, could not gain high marks.

Question 5

Part (a)

Few candidates attempted this question; however, a reasonable standard of answer was produced by those who did. In general, the standard of outline produced for an AO1 question was poor, although the inclusion of some detail about Pentecost and belief in the Parousia was pleasing to see from the more able candidates.

Part (b)

The more able candidates produced a range of ideas in their responses to this question, including how the early Christians practised in the synagogues, the teachings of the Apostles, the breaking of bread and prayers. Unfortunately, answers to the assessment part of the question were rather generalised and did not tend to offer many alternative thoughts and views as to which was the most important element for the survival of the church in the early days of Christianity.

Question 6

Part (a)

This was the more popular of the optional questions in the Christianity section. The examination of traditional Christian beliefs about the human condition elicited basic responses from less able candidates which focused on beliefs about the idea of the 'fall' from the Old Testament, whilst better responses from more able candidates focused on humans being made in the image of God, of original sin being inherent in humans, and the belief that Christians are capable of being helped by God.

Part (b)

This part was addressed less well. Although the question asked for an outline, there still needed to be some depth in the response to access the higher levels of the Mark Scheme. Candidates found it more difficult to write about the assessment part of the question and how people seek some sort of salvation in many different ways. Few suggested that this type of religious language could have any major meaning in our present day community, which is no longer Christian in emphasis. This was an interesting point to argue.

Section C Hinduism

Few responses were received to the Hinduism section of the examination, but those that were revealed a good standard of both knowledge and understanding among candidates

Question 7

Part (a)

Outlines of Gandhi's teachings on non-violence were both comprehensive and detailed, with candidates looking at the spiritual development and political and practical application of ahimsa.

Part (b)

Explanations of why Gandhi campaigned on behalf of the dalits (untouchables) were detailed and many candidates considered the viewpoint that beliefs about dalits were fundamentally against the principles and spirit of the Hindu faith.

Question 8

Part (a)

This was, by far, the more popular of the optional questions in the Hinduism section. The majority of candidates offered a straightforward examination of the Hindu concept of God, and good depth of knowledge was shown on the aspects of the Trimurti.

Part (b)

This part of the question was a little more challenging for candidates to unpack. In general, however, there were some thoughtful responses and, whilst many candidates recognised that the vast range and variety of deities indicate that these are predominately what Hindus relate to, there were some pleasing counter claims, particularly from the Krishna Consciousness perspective, that ultimate reality is a personal god and that merging the soul with Brahman is a stepping stone to this goal.

Question 9**Part (a)**

Very few candidates attempted this question. Those who did were able to adequately explain how these holy men live without material possessions, and that spiritual life is the highest way. They were also able to explain how sannyasins and gurus sometimes live in holy places such as Varanasi and are at hand to offer prayers and spiritual advice to other people.

Part (b)

More able candidates offered a full and detailed understanding coupled with an appreciation of the distinctive role of the temple priest, whereas less able candidates provided generalised responses about the role of the priest in the temple and not saying much about the skills of the priest. There appeared to be equal support and weight given to both sides of the statement on whether Hindus are dependent on holy men in order to practise their religion.

Section D Islam

A large number of candidates addressed the Islam section of the paper.

Question 10**Part (a)**

Many identified that 'Islam' refers to a monotheistic faith whose followers accept Muhammad as the final prophet of Allah. Many candidates were able to succinctly relate the concepts of peace, submission, humility, etc. to the term, which revealed a good standard of preparation for this type of question.

Part (b)

Some struggled to provide a reasonably thorough response to the question of how the death of Muhammad led to the origins of Shi'i Islam. Most candidates recalled something of the dispute over leadership between the different groups of Muslims, but only a minority went on to offer a more developed answer which revealed knowledge of the reasons for the dispute and how it was contested.

Question 11**Part (a)**

This was a popular question in which candidates were required to provide a precise explanation of what is meant by the term 'shirk'. Responses were usually of a good standard. The second part of the question on why 'shirk' might be considered to be a sin elicited a wide range of responses from candidates. Some of the more able candidates referred to Qur'anic references to behaviour of polytheists and idolaters and how they should expect punishment from this

approach to life in a Muslim community. Almost all candidates were able to discuss, at some length, an understanding that 'shirk' is associated with anything to do with Allah.

Part (b)

This question about judgement was answered very well by the majority of candidates. Almost all were able to access the highest levels of the Mark Scheme by giving a thorough treatment to the topic and offering both breadth and depth in their responses. Good examples were provided and candidates were largely able to establish arguments for and against.

Question 12

Part (a)

This was the more popular of the optional questions on the Islam section. Almost without exception, candidates were able to identify the main features of prayer in Islam, offering an in-depth approach to the question. Some candidates were able successfully to incorporate ritual actions undertaken in prayer that revealed submission, humility, tawhid and gratitude.

Part (b)

Candidates were equally as successful in their responses to this question on the practice of fasting. Qur'anic obligation and following the example of Muhammad were at the forefront of some detailed and thoughtful answers seen. The acknowledgement by more able candidates, that fasting serves to discipline a community as well as unite it, was extremely insightful. The assessment part of the question was addressed just as successfully by candidates who were able to express support for the claim as well as counter arguments. At the forefront of some sound answers was the comment that Muslims are united by other practices, not just fasting, and many linked into the sunnah of the prophet which provided a historical link to the first ummah.

Section E Judaism

Most responses to this section of the paper were of a high standard

Question 13

Part (a)

Ideas about God's justice were clear in almost all of the responses, and especially for all of his chosen people.

Part (b)

This question proved to be challenging to candidates. Not all candidates were able to discuss with some authority the idea that God will use history to achieve his objective for the people, and that many of these ideas are expressed in the Psalms. It was anticipated that candidates might offer different examples as a way of explaining God as one who works through history; some of the more able candidates did respond in this way.

Question 14

Part (a)

This question was generally answered well by candidates and they seemed to have prepared well to answer such a question. Plenty of detail was offered on the four services on Shabbat and much technical terminology was used in candidates' answers.

Part (b)

This question was, in the main, successfully answered by candidates. Preparation, the welcoming of the Shabbat in the home and the Friday night meal were all considered in some depth. The value of Shabbat for Jews today was clear to see in candidates' responses, but there were also counter arguments. Candidates were rewarded for clear and coherent organisation of their evaluative responses.

Question 15

Part (a)

This proved to be the least popular question for candidates on the Judaism section. A number of candidates described a range of the distinctive features of Hasidic Jewish communities, particularly in the role of the Rebbe as teacher, intermediary, even Messiah.

Part (b)

This 'teachings' question saw candidates offering some sound outlines in response, including the relationship with Kabbalah and ideas of hidden truths and tiers of knowledge. Candidates were less successful in arguing both for and against the claim that the Hasidic movements will always be a minority within Judaism.

Section F Sikhism

There were few candidates responding to this section of the question paper in comparison to the other sections, but those who did respond to the Sikhism questions offered good quality answers, demonstrating scholarly opinion with an understanding of a diversity of views.

Question 16

Part (a)

All candidates were able to demonstrate with authority and accuracy reasons behind the founding of the Khalsa

Part (b)

Equally, candidates wrote at some length on the importance of sewa, homing in on the concept of service in Sikhism and providing relevant examples on the langar and the importance of actions of the body and thoughts of the mind revealing humility. Many candidates were able to offer some good illustrative examples to support what they said from today's Sikh society.

Question 17

Part (a)

This was the more popular of the two optional Sikhism questions. Most candidates were able to gain satisfactory marks by including detail beyond that Sikhs cover their heads, take off their shoes, etc., and it was pleasing to see that many had covered details of the centrality of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Part (b)

Again, candidates accessed higher levels of the Mark Scheme by discussing the Sikh view that the spiritual energy of nam japna and kirtan is greater when practised in the sangat and the fact that the Sikh community provides many opportunities, collectively, for practising sewa.

Assessment for and against the claim as to whether Sikhs would be better served by asking for advice today from another Sikh were well observed and measured and it was clear there were arguments for both sides. Most candidates responded strongly on the side of the Guru Granth Sahib, citing that a religious text might have more authority than a human, no matter how great that human was.

Question 18

Part (a)

This proved to be the less popular of the optional questions in this section of the paper. Those candidates who did address the question sometimes failed to access beyond the basic levels of the Mark Scheme with references to ritualism in the 15th century Punjab and the inequality of birth and gender. More able candidates gave details of the caste system and the exclusion of women.

Part (b)

This question was addressed very well by all the candidates who responded to it. Many offered both detail and depth on the teachings of Guru Nanak, providing story and example.

Candidates were also able to assess the claim that his teachings were a total rejection of the context of the day with accuracy and relevant material. Some of the more able candidates were able to examine Guru Nanak's opposition to the 'mindless' religious practices and rituals of the day and give some examples of incidents where Guru Nanak opposed these rituals and how he taught that family life was the ideal.