

Religious Studies A (World Religion(s))

General Certificate of Education **J620**

General Certificate of Education (Short Course) **J120**

OCR Report to Centres

January 2013

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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B603 Ethics 1 (Relationships, Medical Ethics, Poverty and Wealth)

General Comments:

The question paper proved accessible to most candidates. Many candidates offered clear and appropriate responses to the questions in parts a) to c) of each section where short answers are required. Some candidates gave extended responses to part c) of the question which will have adversely affected their overall time management.

In part d), where candidates are required to demonstrate their understanding of an issue, many candidates offered responses which demonstrated a sound grasp of the significance of the issue for the religion of their choice. Many candidates backed up their understanding with useful reference to religious teaching and, in some cases, support from religious texts and/or the life and attitudes of key figures within the religion.

There were many excellent responses to the e) part of each question. Responses from many candidates consisted of well presented arguments on either side of the debate and clear evidence of a personal viewpoint. The personal viewpoint was often offered as a distinct section of the response but many of the higher level candidates showed the personal response as a series of comments, weighing up the various arguments and woven into the discussion as a whole. A significant number of responses consisted of paragraphs of information about points of view with little to connect these views and little attempt to evaluate them. This format is not appropriate to this specification and for the highest level to be achieved a discussion weaving the arguments together is required. Most candidates, as required by the rubric, considered the issue with clear reference to the religion of their choice. Others offered limited or general religious content and, on some occasions, no religious content at all. Some responses were well developed along one side of the issue but with no consideration of alternative views or shades of opinion. These latter sorts of response as well as responses which did not offer any personal comment at all could not be given much credit.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A: Religion and Human Relationships

- a) Very few candidates failed to offer a correct response.
- b) Very few candidates failed to offer at least one reason appropriate to the religion of their choice.
- c) Most candidates focused on appropriate religious responses; for example, the sanctity of marriage, the Christian idea of "one flesh" and the sinfulness of fornication. Other candidates referred to cohabitation being an unstable environment in which to raise children. Hardly any candidates addressed more prosaic reasons such as; promiscuity producing low self-esteem, wanting sex to be special on your wedding night and the risk of sexual diseases.
- d) Although there were some excellent responses demonstrating an accurate understanding of religious views on this issue, in many responses the link between belief and practice was not evident. Some responses focused on divorce rather than remarriage.

- e) Some candidates did not seem to grasp the meaning of the term 'outdated' in the stimulus. Others just wrote about their views on marriage without much reference to their chosen religion. There were some excellent discussions about the relevance of marriage today referring, for example, to the 'old fashioned cultural aspects' which could make it seem a form of commitment from a past era when religious belief was more significant. Many responses were characterised by a number of statements supported with one comment. Real discussion was often lacking. Some responses were concerned more with the marriage ceremony than the institution itself.

Section B: Religion and Medical Ethics

- a) Most candidates offered a correct response to this question
- b) Typically, two contrasting views were offered, normally the idea of cruelty to living creatures versus benefit to humanity. This was often backed up with reference to the contrasting ideas of stewardship and dominion. It was rare to see candidates writing about cosmetics testing instead of medical research.
- c) Candidates were asked to focus on one attitude. This was intended to prevent candidates offering responses which discussed all sides of the issue. Most candidates managed to focus on one attitude and described it effectively. Some wrote unnecessarily lengthy responses.
- d) The focus of the question was explanation of reasons for differences in views about suicide. Responses which referred to different views within the religion of their choice, and the reasons for those views, could be awarded the highest level. Some responses just described views without explanation whilst others consisted of a continuation of the discussion initiated in part c) about euthanasia. These discussions were not always made relevant to the issue of suicide.
- e) The best response to this stimulus took a broad sweep of the issue looking at several aspects of the debate about the taking of life. Some strayed into the areas of war and capital punishment, which could be credited but most stayed within the area of Medical Ethics. Responses which just rehearsed the abortion or the euthanasia debate alone, tended to lack the discussion necessary for the higher levels. Personal viewpoints sometimes took precedence over religious content.

Section C: Religion, Poverty and Wealth

- a) A significant number of students were able to define this, clarifying their response with an example. Responses which consisted of an example alone were not given any credit.
- b) Most candidates found little difficulty in offering two reasons. There was a significant amount of religious content in many responses.
- c) Although it was possible to offer purely practical reasons for disease such as poverty or poor sanitation, most responses referred to religious teaching about this issue. Some referred to the view that disease could be a punishment. Others referred to how human greed, (which was condemned by the religion of their choice) leads to an unequal distribution of wealth and a consequent lack of decent living conditions which in turn leads to disease.

- d)** This part of the question stretched many candidates. Some wrote only about the use of money, which could be given credit but wealth is a wider concept. Money was often wrongly referred to as the root of all evil. Most candidates managed to support their response with appropriate religious teaching and many emphasised the importance of wealth being shared as an aspiration for most religions.
- e)** Many responses focused on the candidate's own feelings about this statement. Some, however, were able to link this to religious teaching very well. Occasionally, responses referred to the wider issues of aid being absorbed by corrupt governments or of it failing to reach the intended recipients. Ideas that giving to the poor should amount to more than giving money were sometimes explored. Some responses, in agreeing with the stimulus, referred to the need to expand trade and economic development and that aid might actually undermine attempts to relieve poverty. Some candidates rehearsed their response to another stimulus about whether the poor should be helped at all or whether charity begins at home. Only a small amount of credit could be given to these responses.

B604 Ethics 2 (Peace and Justice, Equality, Media)

General Comments

Most candidates answered from a Christian perspective with the majority of non-Christian responses being Islamic. All questions were attempted although the great majority of candidates attempted sections A and B. On the whole, section C tended to produce the weakest responses, with quite generalised answers which made limited use of religious knowledge and teachings.

The question paper provided good differentiation between the candidates and produced a full range of marks. There were few rubric errors. Where rubric errors occurred they were usually the result of weaker candidates attempting all three sections. Candidates generally have a good understanding of the demands of the rubric. Many candidates spent very little time on parts a), b) and c), allowing themselves plenty of time to attempt parts d) and e). However, a minority of candidates are still limiting themselves by writing far more than is required to earn the marks for questions in parts a), b) and c). This is particularly true of part c) questions. It is encouraging to note, however, that this is happening less frequently.

The part d) questions allowed the candidates to demonstrate very well their skills of understanding, application and analysis resulting in a good level of differentiation. A common error continues to be inaccurately attributing beliefs to particular denominations, such as assuming that all Roman Catholics support capital punishment. It would be more accurate simply to refer to 'some Christians'. It is also important that candidates back up points made with Biblical or religious teachings rather than generalising.

Answering part e) questions well requires the candidates to identify the issue and enter into a discussion with and between the views expressed, ensuring there are justified arguments presented for the opinions expressed. A minority of candidates are still writing far too little to allow themselves to do this. Some candidates will begin a paragraph with 'a weakness of this argument is...' but then go on to say something completely unrelated. Some otherwise very good responses failed to get out of Level 3 because they contained insufficient religious knowledge. Some other responses contained a great deal of religious knowledge but were descriptive and did not enter into a discussion. For Level 4, evidence of both knowledge and evaluation is required. Some candidates were let down by the personal viewpoint which was stated, but not supported or justified.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A: Religion, Peace and Justice

- a) Most candidates were able to give an accurate definition of the term. A minority were not specific, referring to someone who had 'done something wrong' or 'sinned'. This was not enough to gain the mark as it is not an accurate definition of the term.
- b) Most candidates gained two marks here. Some candidates mentioned particular jobs that a religious person might work in to pursue social justice and, in the majority of cases, this gained the marks since it is a fair response to the question. A minority of candidates confused social justice with criminal justice and so failed to achieve the marks. The most common mistake was to misread the question and give **reasons why** Christians might work for social justice rather than the **ways in which** they might do so.

- c) The question asked for one attitude towards war. Where candidates had read the question correctly most achieved all three marks. Some listed three attitudes to war, or gave two opposing views and so limited their marks.
- d) There were some excellent answers to this question and most candidates made good use of Biblical teaching in their responses to question 2d). Many candidates only achieved Level 2 as their answers lacked the detail and development required for Level 3. Some candidates talked about punishment generally rather than focusing on capital punishment. Responses to question 4d) often lacked specific teaching.
- e) Whilst there were some excellent responses to this question, the majority of candidates only achieved Level 2 or 3. Whilst candidates were able to use a range of Biblical and religious teachings, they often missed the main point of the discussion by applying them to the issue of forgiveness or the use of violence and war without relating them back to the specific issue of punishment. Surprisingly, almost no candidates discussed the potential tension between personal forgiveness and the role of state punishment. Some candidates limited themselves to a discussion of capital punishment. Many of the best responses looked at whether there was a tension between wanting to punish and needing to/having to punish. Many answers focused successfully on the aims of punishment but some failed to develop this further by relating it to religious beliefs and teachings.

Section B Religion and Equality

- a) Most candidates gained the mark for this question. Where they did not, it was almost always because their response used the term 'equal' or 'equality' with no further explanation and so failed to provide a definition.
- b) Almost all candidates gained two marks for this question with the most common responses being 'racism' and 'sexism' although some gave more specific examples such as wage inequality.
- c) This question was not, generally, well answered with a large proportion of candidates not understanding the word 'reconciliation'. Some seemed to guess and answered on fairness and equality, others fared slightly better by equating reconciliation with forgiveness. Where candidates did know the term, however, there were some excellent responses both on Christianity and Islam.
- d) This question was answered too generally with the majority of candidates achieving Level 2 or 3. Where candidates failed to achieve Level 3 it was generally because their responses lacked sufficient development. Most candidates who attempted question 8e) were able to give a number of Biblical teachings but often did not explain the relevance or application of these. Candidates attempting question 10e) often gave quite general responses which talked about fairness but gave very few specific religious teachings.
- e) There were some excellent responses to this question, with most candidates achieving Level 3 and many Level 4. The strongest candidates brought their discussion back to the issue of importance in society generally and Christian society in particular. Many candidates made effective use of the recent debate on female bishops in the Church of England. Most candidates made good use of Biblical and religious teaching, but sometimes failed to relate this to the question, instead focusing on the broader issue of gender equality. As always, the strongest responses entered into a genuine debate, not merely stating and supporting the reasons on each side but also providing counter-argument and evaluation of the various view points. Many successful candidates avoided debating whether women 'should' stay home and care for children and instead explored the question of whether the role of 'carer' or 'provider' is more important in society, usually

concluding that both are necessary. Most candidates successfully focused on Christian' or 'Islamic' society by examining the role of women within the religious context.

Section C Religion and the Media

- a) Almost all candidates gained the mark on this question. A very wide range of possible responses was available.
- b) Most candidates gained both available marks here. Where they did not, it was generally because they had repeated the same reason twice in slightly different words or provided one answer and then developed it without giving a second reason.
- c) Most candidates achieved full marks with many relating it to the issue of free will. Some candidates failed to make the connection between the faith and the issue and gave very general responses, but this was the exception. On the whole, this question was well answered.
- d) Some good answers here, with candidates attempting question 14d) often making the link between Jesus' teaching on 'impure thoughts' being the same as adultery and pornography or the inappropriate use of sexuality in the media. Where candidates did not progress beyond Level 2 it was often because they did not make specific links to the use of sex in the media but wrote more generally about religious attitudes to sex. Answers to question 16d) were often very general and did not make good use of specific Islamic teachings.
- e) There were a small number of excellent answers. Many candidates talked about censorship in general and the advantages of preventing small children from seeing sex and violence, but few related this back successfully to religious teaching. Few candidates moved beyond the topics of sex and violence to explore the wider political and religious implications of censorship, although when this was attempted it was usually done very well indeed. Many Islamic responses spoke about the controversy over the 'Danish cartoons' although the wider implications of this were rarely discussed. Many spoke about censorship and its effect on Islamophobia. The strongest responses considered the effects of 'selective' censorship where only negative aspects of a religion are given attention.

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