Examiners' Report

Summer 2012

GCE Religious Studies (6RS04)
Paper 1F Islam

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Introduction

It is clear that very many candidates worked hard in their preparation for this paper, including evidence of wider reading around the topics. Many showed evidence of commendable study skills. This included the ability to focus explicitly on the demands of the question, structuring their answers in a clear coherent manner and marshalling arguments into a critical evaluation.

Very few candidates attempted to fuse parts (a) and (b) together whereas in previous years, this approach led some candidates to pay insufficient attention to the various demands of AO2 (Assessment Objective 2).

The main focus in all the levels for the mark scheme of AO1 (Assessment Objective 1) relates to an understanding of the passage. Candidates had different methods for examining part (a). For example, two popular methods were:
(i) to work their way systematically through the extract and link it to other scholars, and
(ii) to select relevant material from the Smart material as a whole and relate this to the passage.

These various methods have been credit worthy and have produced some very good answers. However, as with other methods, these could have potential problems:
(i) sometimes a close analysis of the text became a simple and basic comprehension exercise rather than the means of placing the Smart material in any meaningful context or showing evidence of analysis, and
(ii) occasionally some candidates, by summarising Smart as a whole, may pay scant attention to the selected passage.

It must be noted that there is no predictable pattern in the choice of selected texts however over the life time of the specification all the three texts will be used.

One of the purposes of this unit is to enable candidates to develop skills in textual analysis. There are important outcomes for candidates, including transferable skills across a range of enterprises, involving careful attention to detail, evidence and reason and also preparation for university work. In addition, this unit provides an opportunity for candidates to reflect upon and debate the implication of their studies of religion.

Question 1
AO1 features of good quality

- Evidence of excellent work with confident understanding of religious and ethical Islamic belifs and their relevance to the social dimension of Islam.
- Examination of the passage in breadth and detail.
- Specific ideas/points of view raised by Smart being addressed. For example, some candidates focused on key areas such as the interaction between the social, ethical, mythological and doctrinal dimensions.
- Creative use of material from their other studies of Islam in the units 6RS01 and 6RS03 and where appropriate 6RS02.
- Using the extract as a spring board to showcase their wider knowledge. For examle, some incorporated selected examples form countries with a strong Islamic heritage.
- Clarity in the conclusion that cohered with the rest of the answer.

Examples of AO1 work that require improvement

- Descriptive accounts of Islam without specific reference to the selected passage.
- Some examples of AO1 were shorter than the AO2 material although there are more marks available for AO1.
- Evidence of candidates using a generic response to Smart which provided only incidental information on the extract itself. These tended to be basic and short outlines of the passage without reference to Islam.

AO2 features of good quality

- Good critical analysis reflecting an evident ability to think through the implications of the passage. Some discussed critical scholarship on Smart and his methods. For example, some questioned whether a definition of religion is possible or even useful.
- Some included scholarly debates about customs and practices and their implications. For example, countires such as Iran, Pakistan, Egypt and the UK.
- In response to the question 'Do you agree with the ideas expressed?' the stronger responses presented their own opinions and located these within their wider areas of study. They referred to scholarly opinion, debating and constructing a valid and well justified argument. These showed a thoughtful understanding of alternative and challenging views and ideas. There were a number of well informed debates about types of jihad and their significance in this context.
- Ability to debate implications for understanding both religion and human experience.

Examples of AO2work that require improvement

- Some candidates answered AO2 in the same manner as AO1 with little evidence of evaluation. Some stated personal opinions and presented little evidence of justifying their ideas.
- Part (b) was sometimes too short and descriptive rather than evaluative.
- Some short answers omitted either implications for understanding religion or understanding human experience or both.
- Sometimes using paragraphs not linked together.

Example 1

In AO1 the candidate focused on Smart's dimensions and applied them to Islam. The candidate concentrated on the social dimension and considered different Muslim approaches to this. There was also consideration of the importance of other dimensions within Islam. It can be noted that AO2 was good as far as it went but it was limited in both depth and breadth.

Example 2

In AO1 the candidate analysed the selected passage in detail and where appropriate illustrated these key ideas with reference to Islam. The candidate presented a good range of material with a thoughtful understanding of the range and differences across Islamic traditions. In AO2 the candidate supported Smart's approach. The candidate commented on differences within Islam of social features and their implications.

Example 1

Plan (a)

- unity, ummah, community, prophet's contribution and effort for one

- "organisations", group, members, rules, participation, rewards/ punishments

- "communal and social significance" religious ceremonies, in mosque + the streets, brings communities together, etc

- "religious and ethical ideas & practises" => unity, tawhid, praying, fasting, zakah, pilgrimage etc

- "adapted to existing ..." sunni/sufi's VS wahabi's
  / liberal \ strict
  ideas/ bidah/innovation
  celebrations

- "affects community"

- "doctrinal" = sacrifice, hajj, stories

- "mythological" = stories

- "ethical" = Sunnah, whats taught in Islam

- "invisible world" - God, tawhid, belief, muhammad

- last 2 lines = all the above shapes how muslims live their lives today.

(b)

1 - "organisation" "communal" "social significance" - agree.

2 - "adapted to existing" - disagree to an extent.

3 - "invisible world" agree.

Implications

✱ 1 = if it wasn't there wouldnt be an ummah, as the prophet clearly desired, no unity, no oneness between muslims

✱ 2 = if we didnt "adapt" we would go against the 'law of the land' which shariah says we must do.

✱ 3 = obv muslims believe in God, miracles, quran, hadith.

(a) This extract by Smart focuses on one of his many dimensions of religion. They are: ethical, doctrinal, et mythological, and ofcourse social. Smart believes that these dimensions is what is needed to call one something a religion. He doesn't do the traditional way by saying one must believe in God as this would exclude Buddhism, and therefore not apply to all the world's major religions.

Smart starts by saying religions are "organisations". That is, they have members, rules, participation, functions and rewards/ punishment just as organisations do. For Islam specifically, this fits in well as Muslims call themselves one ummah (community), showing that they are in fact an active worldwide group with millions of members. Also, Smart claims that religions have a "communal and social significance". This could be referring to the communal & religious ceremonies that Islam offer. These include: eid, ramadan, menfils, religious gathering, qurbaan, urs etc. All these events have a "communal and social significance" as they bring the community together providing a sense of brotherhood & unity. Also, Sunni Muslims tend to have jaloos's on the street celebrating the prophet's birthday. This is such an event where people take a day off work, police must be involved & extra care & caution is needed. It has a "communal & social significance" as it brings brothers & sisters within the Ummah closer.

Smart goes on to talk about how the "religious and ethical ideals & practises" are what "shape" the social dimension of religion. Within Islam there are far too many "ideals

& practises" for me to mention all of them here today. A few main ones are; fasting during ramadan, giving zakah (charity) [whether it be fardh (compulsory) or sadaqah (optional)], hajj, praying salah (prayer) daily, men going to the mosque and women praying at home - and so on & so forth. The question that arises is how do these contribute to the "social shape" of Islam? Well, they create an example of how Muslims should live their daily lives. For example, if a woman knows that Shariah states that she is encouraged to pray at home, then she will and only go out for other purposes, shaping her "social" routine.

"religious and ethical ideals are adapted to existing social conditions and attitudes" is what Smart goes on to say. This could refer to how strict a Muslim should be in their ideals in contemporary society which links to the Sunni/Sufi's debate against the wahabi's. This is based on wahabi's saying muslim "ideals and practises" today should be as they were 1400 years ago. They believe that Sunni's & Sufi's are doing bidah (innovation) & adding to religion what was previously not there, and they see this as a bad thing. Wahabi's would argue that "adapting" to modern society's has it's limits. Sunni's & Sufi's, in their defense would argue that they are simply being realistic & "adapting to social conditions and attitudes" of the society they live in. They say that they are not going against Shariah (Islamic law) & so are getting rewarded for the extra they do. Sunni and Sufi Muslims would say that Islam

definitely "adapts to social conditions and attitudes" as it needs to as part of it's "social dimension".

Smart says that religion "affects the community" it finds itself in. This is very true for Islam as it has definitely affected and created an impact wherever Muslims are. Some would say this is positive whilst others would argue against it. Those who argue for it would say it makes the public more aware of a peaceful religion and it gets rid of all the misconceptions people hold about Islam. Others would say these misconceptions stem from somewhere and these reasons need to be addressed. Therefore they would argue against it ~~saying it~~ pointing at September 11, taliban in Afghanistan and Bin Laden being found in Pakistan. Therefore, Smart saying that religion "affects the community" does apply to Islam, whether in a positive or negative way is up for debate.

Smart says that the "doctrinal, mythological and ethical dimensions express the nature of the invisible world." Doctrinal could include, sacrifices made, wars fought and miracles that took place (e.g. the breaking of the moon in half & then rejoining), mythological could include stories of the prophets lives (e.g. moses and his stick, jesus and his people, Noah & the ark), ethical including morals and codes of ethics in the Quran and hadith. "Invisible world" refers to believing in a higher power e.g. God, heaven & hell, Satan, prophets, angels etc. This applies to Islam as Islam has an "invisible world" which to the Muslim is a belief as

strong as anything in the visible world, if not stronger. It includes events such as the birth of Isa without a father, the light of Muhammed when he was born, the many miracles in the prophets lives, the many & sexless angels that exist and so on and so forth. This makes Islam the religion it is today.

Example 2

The most important argument the writer is making is that the "religions are not just ~~both~~ a systems of belief. the~~y have a communal & social significance~~ are also organisations". This suggests that ~~that~~ religions are not merely beliefs ~~but~~ which are read about ~~from~~ in holy book or stories of the past but they ~~make~~ show ~~their~~ people has to live their lives and play their part in the community.

The principle of communal Jihad (striving for good and forbidding evil) in Islam can be linked to this first point. Communal Jihad for Muslims is the aspect of striving to do your best to help your community, this can be done by giving zakat (charity) to the poor, by keeping your streets clean, helping your neighbours etc.
(saying of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW))

A famous hadith called the hadith of Jibrail states that a man dressed in white ones came to the Prophet (SAW) and asked him what Islam is and the reply was the five pillars (hajj (pilgrimage), salah (prayer) shahadah (testimony of faith), zakat (charity) & fasting). ~~So~~ This implies that with out ~~zak~~ the giving of zakat Islam is not complete.

Also the word Islam in Arabic means peace & submission so how can muslims be living in a society which is not peaceful.

Another key point made in the Anil passage is that the social shape of religion is determined by the

religious & ethical ideas of the religion and also the practises (amal) that it has. If we critically analyse this we can see that this too relates to Islam as Islam is said to be a deen (a way of life), where muslims are ~~taug~~ taught how to live their lives by divine guidance eg Quran & Sunnah (the way of the Prophet (SAW). Islamic fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) is derived from hadith & Quran only so muslims are meant to follow this alone.

However there is an alternative view which is in contrast to this, the point of view is that ~~the~~ some of the muslims in Britain: are being lead to extremisin and this is always portrayed in the media as if Jihad means the killing of all non-believers and Islam is a barbaric religion. This is not true as this social shape ~~of the religion~~ is not based on religious and ethical ideas it is not even part of Islam as Islam condems the killings of innocents and the greater Jihad is described as the fight against your lower self in Islam. People are ~~being lead~~ to extremisin not because of their religious views but because of lack of knowledge about the religion. ~~and~~ This is because there is a lack of teachers with a sanad (a chain back to the Prophet (SAW). And also because muslims have seperated their social lives and their

religious lives. Muslims in Britain are alot more concerned about the academic education of their childres then the religious education.

Another reason for lack of knowledge is the fact that there is alot of misinterpretations. Tariq Ramadhan a Muslim Scholar has said "People take from the content but not the context" This happening too often, for example the so called Muslim group calle Al-Muhajiroon believe that those lunatics who killed the innocent people in the 7/7 bombings were justified and were following the Quran as their there is a verse in the Quran which says "kill the disbelievers where ever you see them". Here clearly they took from the content but not the context as this verse relates to Muslims in a battle trying to defend them selves.

A point made in the article is that ethical ideas are adapted to existing social conditions and attitudes. Comparing this to Islam shows that it is true and and t how ever there are two views The first view is that this is happening in a good way Muslims use the principle of Qiyas (making analogies) from to apply the Islamic laws to this time, as certain things didn't exist at the time of the Prophet (SAW) so he didnot comment on them. But making

analogies does seem like the sensible approach. The second view is that religion is being put to the side and is not given the importance that it should be given. For example the practise ~~idea~~ of zakat was carried out by everyone at the time of the Prophet (SAW), and when he died some people tried to stop but Abu Bakr As-Saddiq (the first khalifah ar rashidun (rightly guided) caliph) said he ~~would~~ would have a war against those that don't ~~didn't~~ pay. ~~if they~~ As he was trying to give the poor their rights. However, now some Muslims don't even know how much they are meant to be paying. This could be a reason why there is poverty & suffering. The principles of religion are not being given importance.

Another key point the writer is making is that the doctrines (beliefs/Imaan) of a religion, mythological and ethical dimensions express a religions claim about the invisible world (Al ghaib). Here the writer is implying that the beliefs, and stories of prophets in the ~~ones~~ holy books teach the followers about the invisible world. Relating this to Islam suggests that it is true as the idea of a day of Judgement (Qiyamah), Jannah (paradise), Jahnnum (hell) ~~death~~ are all expressed in the wahy (revelations) given to prophets.

Overall the ~~key points in the article~~ arguments

expressed in the article are that religion has a communal significance, and ~~different totality~~ it is adapted to the lives of men to improve social conditions. And that ~~it is made up of~~ the doctrinal, ethical & mythological dimensions of a religion show how a mans life should be lead.

b) I agree with the ideas expressed because the doctrinal, ethical & mythological dimensions ~~are~~ complete a religion. And the implications of that are that the believers follow it with sincerity and make it a part of their lifes.

If we critically evalute the passage further it is clear to understand that our prachses, religious ideas do shape our lives. However prachses can be sometimes become "empty shell" rituals with out the correct intentions. In Islam it is said in a hatith "& that actions will be judged by their intentions". So it is important for muslims to learn about their religion so when they do perform a religious ritual they have the correct intention. Islam is a way of life so the ethical dimension & doctrinal dimension is bought in to the social life.

The Prophet (SAW) in a hadith stated by Aisha (RA) was described as the walking Quran. He did every thing by the book and it lead him to become the best man who has ever lived according to Muslims. The best man in todays society would normally be considered as the richest or the one with a lot of power. However, the Prophet (SAW) had the best Aklaq (character) he had the best manners (adab) and was a just ruler too. Nowdays it is hard to find a man with such patience and I believe this is because the principles of the religion are not being given significance.

I also agree with the writer when he suggests that religions are being institutionalised, as for example the Regeants Park Mosque in London is very different to mosque found at the time of the Prophet (SAW), the Prophet's Mosque in Medinah (saudi arabia) is a simple place to pray and reflect. But Regeants Park Mosque doesn not just that but has a cafe, a library & a shop too, it is more of an organisation.

Some may say that religions being institution alised is a good thing because it will help the religions to progress and that even at the time of the second Khalifah Umar (RA) he instiunalized alot he built schools, Mosques, roads and made alot progress to the religion it spread alot in his reign.

I think the implications of the fact that the doctrinal,

mythological, and ethical dimensions express a religion's claims about the nature of the invisible world (Al Ghaib) are all positive. This is because for example in Islam in the Quran in the surah fatiha (the opening) (chapter) verse 3 it is said "maliki yaw-muddin" meaning Master of day of Judgement. Warns the Muslims and reminds the muslims that their actions will be judged. And so this makes muslims a lot more aware of God so they have {taqwa} (awareness of God) and try to have Ihsan (to worship God as if you see him, or as if he is watching you). The implication of this are that Muslims would be more likely to do good deeds.

Some people may argue that religions are just systems of beliefs (Iman) but I disagree with that as having a belief and ~~acting~~ is different from the consequences/implications of that belief which are a lot more important.

Overall I generally agree with the writer, however I disagree with the statement "It is important to distinguish between the ethical dimensions of religion and the social dimensions". As im Islam is a way of life for people ~~it is not~~ the ethics are not separate from the social dimension. Muslims fight Jihad al Akbar (greater Jihad) everday.

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