

# Religious Studies Sample Answers Paper 1

## Example Answers

### Paper One Christianity and Islam

Name three things which Christians believe about God. (3 marks)

Christians believe that God is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all-knowing) and eternal.

State what Christians mean when they talk about the Trinity. (3 marks)

Christians believe that God is the one true God but has three distinct roles: he is God the father, the creator of everything, he is God the son, who came down in human form as Jesus to save the world, and he is God the Holy Spirit, which is the power of God which entered Jesus at his baptism.

Outline **one** Christian belief about life after death. (3 marks)

Catholics believe in purgatory. This is a place between heaven and hell which everyone must go to make sure that their soul is purified before they can enter heaven. This is because the Bible says: 'Nothing impure will ever enter heaven, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful.'

Explain why there are different Christian beliefs about salvation. (6 marks)

Salvation is the belief that the relationship between God and humans, which was broken because of the original sin, has been repaired through the sacrifice of Christ. There are different Christian beliefs about salvation because there are different interpretations of the Bible due to different translations and different teachings from the different churches. Literal or fundamentalist Christians believe that every word in the Bible is true - it is inerrant - whereas modernist or liberal Christians believe that the Bible can be interpreted to fit in with today's society because it was written by different people over many centuries. So, some believe that Jesus's death on the cross gives salvation to everyone if they believe in Christ because Jesus taught 'whoever believes in the son shall have eternal life'. Although some believe that salvation occurs through doing good things such as charity, St Paul taught that it is not good works but through the grace of God that people are saved. This contrasts with the early Jewish Christians who believed that they should follow the Jewish laws of the Torah, such as sacrifices in the temple, in order to be saved. It is really a matter of which denomination the Christian is as to what they believe about salvation, but if God is considered to be all-loving and has already sacrificed himself as his son (the incarnation), surely it is a combination of belief, good works and grace.

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'The Bible is never wrong.' Discuss this statement. 15 marks

Fundamentalists would argue that the statement is correct. They believe every word is true and is inerrant. St Paul in his second letter to Timothy wrote that 'all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching and training in righteousness'. They believe that God inspired the different writers of the Bible and therefore the Bible is the true word of God and every commandment within the Bible is correct. However, because the Bible was put together by the early Christian church in the fourth century and was written by different writers over many centuries, liberal Christians believe that the Bible, although containing spiritual truths, is not the literal truth but is portraying the views of the times in which the writer was inspired by God. For instance, the Old Testament does not condemn slavery, but St Paul hints that Onesimus should be given his freedom. Yet he also indicates that even if you are a slave or a free man, 'you are all one in Christ', which might suggest he accepted slavery. However, today Christians would state that slavery is wrong. So does this mean that the Bible is wrong?

People who are not believers in Christianity would argue that the Bible is just a collection of stories made up to try and convince people that there is a deity and an after-life in order to give them hope and a purpose in life. But does this make the Bible wrong? Fairy tales, such as Cinderella, are just made-up stories, but they contain morals and give hope that there will be a happy-ever-after. Some people might argue that they give an unreal picture of life and there are no such things as fairy godmothers and princes who seek the owner of a lost slipper, but even they probably enjoyed listening to such stories when they were young.

However, some people might argue that the Bible is wrong in its attitudes, such as its condemnation of homosexuality and the portrayal of women in a negative way. St Paul's views on women not having authority in the church have been disputed. Some Christians believe that because of the patriarchal society at the time, St Paul had no option but to portray women in this light. Other people have said he was not against women because he said they were 'one in Christ'. Genesis also has different interpretations on the role of women. Genesis 1 states both male and female were made 'in the image of God' whereas Genesis 2 describes that Eve was created as a companion for Adam out of his rib, perhaps indicating she was not as important. Yet these different comments in the Bible do not make it wrong because they were written at different times and the comments on Paul are made by different people. No one has the same opinions - it would be a boring world if they did.

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And who is to say whose opinion is correct and whose is wrong?

Non-believers will criticise the Bible for giving false hope and by referring to the different interpretations and contradictions within its text. They would state that this makes it wrong. But even if you do not believe in what the Bible says, it is difficult to not agree that most societies are based around the final six of the ten commandments. So surely there are some parts of the Bible which can be seen as 'right' because people base their lives on them.

What is prophethood (risalah)? (3 marks)

Prophethood is the way Allah communicates with mankind. Allah has chosen people to be his prophets since the beginning of creation because humans need to be guided about their purpose and how to live a virtuous life because human knowledge is limited.

What do Muslims mean when they talk about predestination (qadar)? (3 marks)

Belief in predestination is the sixth and last article of Islam. It is the belief that everything good or bad, all moments of happiness or sorrow, pleasure or pain, come from Allah. Although humans are given the gift of free will by Allah, it is Allah who is omniscient and knows everything in the past, present and future, so he is the one who knows the best course of action.

Outline the importance of the Day of Judgement (Yawmuddin). (3 marks)

Belief in Yawmuddin is the fifth article of faith for Muslims. It is when they are judged on their deeds in life as to whether they will go to paradise (al-Janna) or to hell (Jahannam). It is important to Muslims because the Qur'an teaches that when it arrives it will be too late for people to repent.

Explain why there are differences between Shi'a and Sunni beliefs. (6 marks)

Sunni Muslims are the largest group, about 90% of the world's Muslims are Sunnis. They regard themselves as the orthodox branch and another name for them is 'People of the Tradition'. There has been a divide between the two groups for many centuries, but they agree on many fundamental beliefs and practices and share the same Holy Book, the Qur'an. However, there are differences in teachings, rituals and political organisation. One of the reasons for the political differences originates from the dilemma of who would succeed the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The group who later became the Sunnis wanted Abu Bakr to lead them, but the group who later became the Shi'as claimed that Muhammad (peace be upon him) had announced at the end of his last pilgrimage that his son-in-law Ali should be

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his successor. As a result, the Shi'as have a different hadith than the Sunnis and this leads to different interpretations of practices such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage.

There are also differences in the prayer rituals. Shi'a Muslims pray three times a day as they join two salahs (midday and afternoon plus the evening and night-time) together. This is because the Qur'an only directly speaks of three prayer times: dawn, midday and evening. However, Sunni Muslims pray five times a day. Another difference is how the Muslim views the Imam. Shi'a Muslims believe that the Imam is sinless by nature and that he is infallible because his authority comes directly from God - the Imam is seen as being divinely appointed. 'O believers, obey Allah...and those in authority among you' (Surah 4). Therefore they may sometimes go on pilgrimages to their tombs and shrines. However, Sunnis disagree with this and argue that such pilgrimages are heretical because leadership of the community is not a birthright but a trust which has to be earned. Therefore, although both groups follow Allah and have the Qur'an as their major revelation from Allah, there are differences because of a different political bias and as a result there can be conflict between the two groups.

Nobody believes in angels (malaikah).' Discuss this statement. (15 marks)

All devout Muslims would disagree with this statement because the Qur'an teaches that they exist and for Sunnis it is the second article of faith. It was the Angel Jibril who revealed Allah's wishes to Muhammad (peace be upon him) which were later written down in the Qur'an. Surah 96 teaches that Allah 'taught Man, that which he knew not'. There are many mentions in the Qur'an about angels and there are so many that only Allah knows the true number. However, a non-believer would agree with the statement because they see angels in the same ways as they see dragons and fairies - they see them as fictional characters or myths from legends. A Christian, however, would agree with Muslims that angels exist because within the Bible there are mentions of angels, such as when the Angel Gabriel said to Mary 'Greetings you are highly favoured' to tell her she would give birth to Jesus. This is even recorded in the Qur'an in Surah 29. However, there are many theological differences about the identity of Jesus/Isa because Islam records him as a prophet and not the son of God. Also some modern theologians have explained the annunciation as a metaphor for a more earthly kind of messenger. Obviously many Christians would dispute this. As a result, it might be stated that religious people believe in angels whereas non-religious people do not.

It could be said that of course only religious people believe in angels because it is part of their traditions and beliefs. But is this true of every religion? Hindus do not believe in angels as portrayed by Christianity and Islam because these angels are created by God/Allah, but they do believe in the asparas and gandharvas, who are distinct heavenly beings but lesser beings than the gods. Buddhism also believes in the existence of gandharvas. So possibly it could be stated that only the Abrahamic

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religions have the same concept of angels. But what about the atheists who talk of guardian angels? On social media lately there was a photo from security footage which showed a shadowy figure of a possible angel outside the ward of someone who was dying but who recovered. This of course can be criticised as wishful thinking or an anomaly with the camera. Psychics call angels spirit guides, but of course many of these so-called connectors with the dead have proved to be fakes. Disbelievers would also argue that if such things as angels existed then why do so many people suffer so much, why do they become homeless, why do dreadful things happen to them? A Muslim would answer this by saying that it is because life is a test. The Qur'an teaches: 'And surely we shall test you...'. The reason that life is a test is that there are two recording angels: 'And indeed, there are over you scribes, generous and recording. They know what you do'. The angel on the right side records all the good deeds while the angel on the left records all the bad deeds. This is because when a Muslim dies the Angel Izra'il separates the soul from the body. And then on the day of Judgement the Angel Israfil blows the trumpet and Allah judges each person by their deeds: 'And to every soul will be paid in full (the fruit) of its deeds, and Allah knoweth best of all that they do.' This belief in the role of angels is different to any of the other religions because they play a very prominent part in a Muslim's life and at death and at judgement. So for a Muslim to state that they do not believe in angels would be a ridiculous statement.

In conclusion, someone could say that there is no such thing as angels because he/she has not seen one or maybe they are going through a very bad time in their life and since there is no such thing as a divine being there are no such things. The major religions in the world have various and sometimes different ideas of angels – Christianity sees Satan as a fallen angel who disobeyed God, but Muslims refute this because angels were created from light (hadith) and without free will, they are immortal and have no physical needs, so Shaytan could not be a fallen angel. But for a Muslim the statement that no one believes in angels is ridiculous and one of the most basic beliefs of their faith.