

SLSS Religious Education Support

Leaving Certificate Religious Education

Section C World Religions Topic 2.2 The Community of Believers

List A	List B
Christianity (any denomination) Judaism	Islam Buddhism Hinduism

Two religious traditions must be studied by all students: **one from list A and one from list B.**

In addition, **higher level** students must undertake a study of the **relationship between Christianity and Judaism**

LCRE Syllabus, p36

Outcomes: Students should be able to

- Give an account of the place of community in each of the (2) traditions
- Describe the organization of people in the tradition
- Give an account of the structure and organization at local and global levels
- Define ‘authority’, stating what it means and where it comes from in the traditions (Higher Level)
- Describe how members of the tradition relate to and understand the world, and vice versa

Homework Question:

Compare the way in which the community of believers is structured in **two** of the following major world religions:

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism

What follows is one student’s response to this question. Using the AfL technique of **comment only marking**, how would you respond to this student? What assessment criteria might you apply? Try to address the following:

- Aspects of the work that deserve merit and praise
- Understanding of the relevant objectives (refer to KUSA square)
- Detail and coherence of the work
- Relevance to the question asked
- Any errors or omissions?
- Advice / recommendations / suggestions for improvement
- Other

Answer 1:

The community of believers in Christianity and Islam both believe in God and in Jesus Christ his only Son. Jesus and God are one but not everyone believes this because some say that he was a prophet and no more. They both come together to pray. Muslims pray in a mosque, Christians in a church. Christians don't have to wash before they go into a church but Muslims do and they have to remove their shoes. Men and women are in separate areas of the Mosque. There is a Pope over the Catholic Church but there is no Pope in Islam. They have Imams to help them pray and we have priests. We both have holy days when we pray. We have Christmas and Easter. Muslims have Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr. So we have a lot in common, and we all believe in God, which is the most important thing really, but Muslims call God Allah. Muslims believe in the Qu'ran and Catholics believe in the Bible. Muslims have the Five Pillars of Islam. These are: Creed (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger), Prayer (5 times a day), fasting (during Ramadan), Almsgiving (surplus wealth to support the poor) and pilgrimage to Mecca just once in a life time. We don't have these but we do believe in God and we pray and some people go on pilgrimage too like Knock and Lough Derg. We have confession but not many people go and Muslims don't. Not many people go to Mass any more and especially not young people but Muslims all go to pray in the Mosque and they believe in God. The Imam is in charge of the prayers and he preaches to the people. This is the same as the priest who is in charge of the prayers and the Mass. Christians belong to different groups like Catholic and Protestants. Muslims can be Sunni or Shia. The Qu'ran is important in Islam and the Bible is important in Christianity. We all believe in Jesus but Christians don't pray to Muhammad like Muslims do. *(348 words)*

Answer 2:

I am going to write about the structure of the community of believers in Christianity (Roman Catholic denomination) and in Islam. Since the question requires me to 'compare' I will detail some of the similarities and differences between the structure of the community of believers in both world religions. Both religions have large memberships (Christians about 2.1 billion – that's 33% of the world's population, while Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world – 21% of the world's population are Muslims, numbering 1.5 billion) and both are spread all over the world.

Firstly, a point of similarity between the two religions is around leadership and authority. The head of the Catholic Church is the Pope who lives in the Vatican in Rome. His authority comes from God and he is the successor of St Peter and the representative of Christ on earth. He delegates authority through his cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests who all serve the Church in various ministries. According to the doctrine of Papal Infallibility the Pope is guided by the Holy Spirit and is therefore without error when teaching on matters of faith or morals. He is assisted in this decision making by the magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church. The priests preach the Word of God to the lay people and help them to understand the meaning of the Bible, especially the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, in Islam the Imam (teacher and community leader) – although he is not an ordained priest – addresses Muslims in the mosque and helps them to understand the meaning of the Qur'an. Unlike the priest, the Imam is elected by the Muslim community and he may be married. The priest is like a mediator between God and humans. He is in a privileged position since he can celebrate the Eucharist and make Christ present to his followers. The Caliph (spiritual leader) is the head of the Muslim community and the worldwide community of Muslims is called the Umma. The Umma must follow the teachings of Muhammad and spread the rule of Allah all over the world. This is similar to the Christian mission to 'go, make disciples of all nations', an instruction given by Jesus to his disciples in Mt 28.

A second similarity is that the community of believers in both religions is not fully united. In Christianity there have been many schisms and conflicts, e.g. the division between Eastern Orthodox and the West in the 11th century, and the 16th century Reformation begun by Martin Luther. This resulted in the formation of various protestant denominations with differing emphases and beliefs on doctrines especially around the meaning of the Eucharist. These split from the Catholic Church even though they all profess a shared faith in Jesus Christ. Similarly, Muslims are divided into two main groups: Sunni and Shi'ite (Shia). Sunni Muslims are more orthodox. 90% of Muslims are Sunni Muslims. They respect the Caliph as a member of Muhammad's tribe – the Koreish, but he must be elected democratically. All religious authority comes from the Qur'an. Shia Muslims believe that Muhammad's family have a divine right to rule. For them, the Imam must descend directly from Muhammad and he has the authority to interpret the Qur'an in doctrine and practice. The Imam's teaching has primary importance since his position is God-given. The opinions of the community are far less important, so there is little tolerance of different views. Like the Sunni tradition, the spiritual leader of the Pope is also elected, but only by the cardinals who are guided by the Holy Spirit.

A third similarity is around the sacred text. The bible is treated as the Word of God in Christianity. It is divinely inspired and was written over a couple of thousand years by many different authors. Various Scripture scholars and theologians explain the meaning of the texts, since there is huge variation in how different groups interpret the Word of God. Some passages are historical (life of Jesus in the gospels) and some are allegorical (e.g. the creation story in Genesis). Fundamentalist Christians believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible as the exact Word of God, with clear unambiguous meaning. Others apply a different approach and try to understand its deeper meaning for our times. This also happens with the Qur'an. Sunni Muslims tend to read the Qur'an with a view to understanding its meaning for Muslims today and how they should live their lives. Shia Muslims only tolerate a strict interpretation of

the Qu'ran as the message of Allah revealed to Muhammad, with no room for personal interpretation. In both religions passages of the sacred text could be taken to justify wars / jihad and other forms of violence but this is not in keeping with their true meaning, according to the majority.

In both communities of believers celebrating times of significance is important. These are marked by festivals and holy days. For example, Catholics mark the season of Lent as a time of prayer and penance. It begins on Ash Wednesday and Catholics usually fast on that day, and restrict their intake of food / alcohol / sweets etc during the 40 days of Lent in preparation for Easter. This sense of 'doing without' helps them to feel their need for God more. Similarly, Muslims have a festival called 'Ramadan' which lasts for 40 days. They are not permitted to eat, drink or have sexual intercourse during the daylight hours of Ramadan. Again, this brings them closer to Allah and reminds them of their dependence on Him. Ramadan ends with the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr. Rituals involve sacrifice, giving alms to the poor, partying, exchanging gifts, visiting relatives and visiting cemeteries. Catholics have a celebration at Easter after Lent. It marks Jesus' resurrection. They too celebrate with a special meal, don't do any work and visit relatives. Catholics remember the birth of Jesus their saviour by marking his birth on Christmas day, 25th December. Muslims also remember the birth of Muhammad, on Maulid-al-Nabi. The ascension of Jesus into heaven is marked on Ascension Thursday each year. So too is the ascension of Muhammad marked on Lail-ul-Miraj. Both religions rest on their respective holy days. For Catholics this day of rest is Sunday, the Lord's day. For Muslims it is Friday. These days are kept holy for communal prayer and worship which strengthens both community of believers in their faith.

Prayer is important to the community of believers in both Christianity and Islam. Both should pray every day, and Muslims should pray 5 times a day, facing Mecca. Catholics have set prayers like the Our Father and Hail Mary and may also say the Angelus at noon or 6pm. Prayer keeps them close to God. Muslims have set prayers accompanied by actions like prostration and kneeling to show that they honour God. Communal prayer is important in both traditions. Catholics go to Mass every week to thank Jesus for His presence in the Eucharist and for the sacrifice of his life. They pray together and profess their faith in the creed. This has a uniting effect and then they are sent out 'to love and serve the Lord' in their daily lives. Muslims pray in a Mosque each Friday at noon. Men all line up shoulder to shoulder, again emphasizing their unity. Women are in a separate area so as not to be a distraction. This does not happen in the Catholic church where men and women pray together, side by side. Catholics are united in the Eucharist, by receiving the gift of Jesus in the bread. Muslims are united by praying together and performing rituals together such as 'wudu' – a ritual cleansing before prayer. Muslims remove their shoes in the Mosque but Catholic don't do this.

Rituals are important in both communities of believers. Key moments of life are marked by both communities: birth, maturity, marriage and death. Catholic babies are baptized into the Catholic Church. This is a sacrament where God is present. Water is poured over the baby's head and he/she is anointed with oil to give them strength to be good Catholics. When a Muslim baby is born the call to prayer is whispered into his ears so that the first words he hears are those about Allah and prayer. At the Bismillah ceremony the 4 year old Muslim begins to recite passages from the Qur'an. Muslims are buried quickly after death and face Mecca. Women and men are buried separately. In Catholicism, women and men are buried together. They may choose to be cremated but this is not allowed in Islam because of the belief in bodily resurrection. Finally, going on pilgrimage is a way in which followers of both religions feel united with their own communities of believers as they go to pray too God / Allah. Places like Lourdes, Knock or the Vatican are places of Christian pilgrimage. These are optional. They help people to go back to their Christian roots. There are prayers like the rosary that should be said there. People come back refreshed and spiritually renewed. Muslims must complete a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. They have certain prayers and rituals to perform there too, like circling the Ka'ba in an anti-clockwise direction while dressed in a white garment. Thousands of people do this at the same time, stressing the unity of the believers. *(1,564 words)*

AfL Comment only marking	Answer 1	Answer 2
Merits of this work		
Understanding of relevant objectives		
Detail and coherence of work		
Relevance to the question asked		
Errors or omissions		
Advice /recommendations/ suggestions for improvement		
Other:		