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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

ISLAMIC STUDIES

GCE Advanced Level

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| <p>Paper 9013/01</p> |
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| <p>Paper 1</p> |
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General comments

On the whole, the performance of the candidates was satisfactory and comparable to that of previous years. **Questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10** were perhaps the most popular and some of the answers here were quite good.

However, there is still general concern about the quality of the answers and also the paucity of Qur'anic references to support discussions. This is an issue that Centres need to tackle seriously because even in questions where this was obviously demanded as a matter of fact, there was not much evidence that the average candidate was familiar with relevant scriptural passages. At this stage of their education, where the next move is to a university or another higher educational institution, showing familiarity with relevant Qur'anic and Hadith passages is of utmost importance. The syllabus has enough material to prepare candidates.

Again, there was an obvious lack of criticality that one would expect at this level. Querying 'received opinions' should not be seen as rejecting the authenticity of those opinions as such, but should be welcomed as a further measure to substantiate a view and even reaffirm that 'received opinion' if it merits or needs affirmation. Islamic scholarship has never shied away from criticality and a measure of that at this level is very helpful. Questions could possibly even be challenged by looking at the opinion/issue from a different angle and arriving at a different conclusion. If the reasoning is sound and is in accordance with the basic tenets of Islam, candidates should have no worries. Examiners would credit such answers if they are in line with the general ambit of the mark scheme.

There were also quite a number of candidates who did not properly distinguish between various parts of a question. This often causes considerable problems to the Examiners because they have to guess which statements belong to which parts.

Further, sometimes points were made without much detailed discussion. In fact, there were cases where candidates just put down the answers in point form only without much explanation. While Examiners could be sympathetic in cases where the candidate is obviously pressed for time, if it is the general style of answering questions, then one cannot expect to get good grades.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Most candidates answered this question quite well, making adequate reference to the events of the Prophet's persecution. It was perhaps the most popular question. Even though the question clearly gives chronological boundaries (between 610 and 622), some candidates described events after the Hijrah. This is indicative of candidates not reading the questions properly.

The question was looking for comments and illustrations on the prophet's tenacity in the face of all the problems he and his followers had to encounter. Candidates were expected to make references to the periods of suffering, persecution, the grave dangers he faced personally, the attempts to 'buy him off' with material gains, etc. Candidates were expected to make references to relevant scriptural passages that support the discussion.

Question 2

This was generally not a popular question and the few who answered it did not do well. Few gave details about the situation of the Jews in Medinah and many candidates did not differentiate between parts **(a)** and **(b)**. There were some cases of stereotyping of Jews. This has to be discouraged at all cost because apart from the fact that it is not acceptable in academic writing, stereotyping often makes one lose sight of the main demand of the question and one strays from the focal point.

- (a)** This part demanded a discussion on the major incidents in the Prophet's relationship with the Jews. These include: his inclusion of them in the Charter of Medinah; their hostility to his prophetic claims; the expulsion of the three main tribes and the reasons connected with it.
- (b)** In part **(b)**, the Examiners were looking for references to the religious and socio-political reasons underpinning the deterioration of the relationship. These would include: the open disagreement with the prophet's mission; the mockery and taunts; and alliance with the opponents of the Muslims. Candidates were expected to explain how these contributed to the worsening of the relationship.

Question 3

This was another popular question, the answers being of mixed quality.

- (a)** Many candidates gave adequate accounts on Abu Bakr, even though some described his life prior to his becoming a Khalifah. Some started with his birth and early life, hence wasting valuable time as the main focus of the question is on his period as a Khalifah. It is quite valid to argue that the substantial help he gave to the Prophet, including the instance where he actually saved his life, indicates that he was a saviour of Islam. However, generally, the term is used to specifically describe the Khilifah period. Hence, candidates were expected to mention in their discussion: his reaction to the apostate tribes, the false prophets, factions within the community, the reluctance not to deviate from the policies of the Prophet and carrying out the 'unfinished business' of the Prophet. Good answers were expected to point out how these led to the unity of the community and hence made Islam stable.
- (b)** The focus of this part of the question was on the split at Siffin, the reasons why the Kharijites disagreed with Ali and why he was forced to confront them. Better answers would have explained the basic doctrinal attitudes of the Kharijites which made them intolerant to others with different views and that Ali's rather more pragmatic approach was not acceptable.

Question 4

This question was also popular but the answers were again mixed. Many candidates gave adequate answers but very good answers were rare.

- (a)** Many merely discussed the structure of the Qur'an whereas Examiners were looking for specific themes that can encapsulate the contents of the Qur'an, with basic passages as examples. Candidates were expected to have raised and discussed main themes such as: the being of God; God-human relationship; human response in worship; and conduct.
- (b)** This part of the question demanded the mention of issues including: the Qur'an as the origin of understanding about the world and how one conducts oneself in it; how it is the source of all guidance and regulations about life in general; its centrality to the Shari'ah and relation to other sources of law.

Question 5

Surprisingly, this was not one of the most popular questions and those who attempted it did not seem to have done that well. Many of those that answered tended to refer to Surahs that they had studied rather than those that were relevant to the question. Hence the answers were generally weak. Examiners were looking for relevant passages from those Surahs set in the syllabus, especially: Surah **1**, **102** and **109**.

Discussion about the creaturely status of human beings, God's concern for them and guidance for them, his judgement of them, and their duties towards him and towards other creatures were some of the main issues candidates were expected to touch on.

Question 6

This question on revelation was generally well answered. Those who attempted it were able to give a better account in part (a) than in part (b).

- (a) Here, the question was asking for general descriptions of the Prophet's experiences of *wahy*, including the occasion of the first revelation, the signs of revelation such as ringing of bells, change of temperature, his heaviness etc. It was expected that candidates would make references to relevant Qur'anic passages, including those that explicitly state that the revelations came entirely according to God's own decree rather than the prophet trying to induce them.
- (b) Examiners were looking for a discussion of the term *kalam Allah* as a specific reference to the eternity of the Qur'anic revelation and its being the word of God, its relation to earlier revelations and its authority in the history of revelation, its acceptance by Muslims without question and its being used as the primary source of personal and communal thinking and action. It was expected that some of the ethical and practical implications of the statement would be alluded to.

Question 7

This question on Ramadan was popular, but the answers were very mixed. Some candidates gave very detailed answers whereas others generalised. Many, across Centres, stated that fasting commenced at sunrise rather than at dawn.

- (a) Candidates were expected to provide a full and detailed account of the daily fast, those who are excused, the rules for expiation, the various individual and communal practices throughout the month and the celebrations at the end of the month. The Qur'anic reference forming the basis of this Pillar was expected to be referred to. Unfortunately, only a few could do that.
- (b) Most of the candidates did well in providing the main points in their answers. It was expected that references would be made to the influence on individual piety, health and general social behaviour as well as the communal benefits including unity within the community and enhancement of relations with others. The effect of Ramadan as a form of spiritual and social training was to be at the basis of the discussion.

Question 8

Even though quite a number of candidates attempted this question and gave detailed answers, this was not one of the most popular questions. The basic problem was that most candidates failed to point out the specific characteristics of the ceremonies that make them distinctively Islamic. This is what the thrust of the question was about. It was not about a general description of marriages and funerals, but it was expected that candidates would identify the specific Islamic elements that set them apart from celebrations in other communities. This would include specific prayers relating to the Qur'an, rituals and other prohibitions that make them very different. Because the question specifically referred to 'your country', the answers seemed mostly experiential.

Question 9

Generally, this question was reasonably answered with most candidates making the connections between the three elements; Angels, Books and Prophets. This was not expected to be a difficult question and therefore clarity and accuracy in answering was important. The three elements of the question forming part of the belief system of Muslims were expected to be connected in the sense of explaining the Islamic understanding of revelation. A detailed discussion on each of the articles was expected and references to relevant basic Qur'anic passages would have added quality to the answers. Unfortunately, many of the answers were very basic without much reference to scriptural passages.

Question 10

This was one of the most popular questions, and candidates on the whole did well, providing some interesting and original discussions, with a few giving some scriptural details.

The question could be answered in a number of ways, but the main answer was expected to look at: the definition of Sunnah, its relationship with Hadith, its relationship with the Qur'an, Sunnah as a model for life and as a means of interpreting the Qur'an. The Examiners were also looking for discussion on how the Sunnah actually influences Muslim life and whether it has the capacity to provide a full framework.

The statement could also be seen in a more negative sense questioning the whole rationale on which it is based. One could raise a question looking at the relative importance of the two primary sources of law (Qur'an and Sunnah) and go on to inquire whether the Qur'an alone is enough.

Question 11

This question was not popular. Those who attempted it gave reasonably satisfactory answers but often with weak examples.

- (a) Candidates were expected to identify the Sunnah, *Ijma'* (consensus) and *Qiyas* (analogy) as tools for interpreting the detailed meaning of the Qur'an and extending the fundamental inspiration it provides. The function of each was to be clearly explained and the relationship between them traced. It could have been pointed out, among other things, that by doing so Muslim scholars were emphasising the eternal message of the Qur'an and that it provides the wisdom to tackle all problems for all times.
- (b) The examples given by candidates were rarely relevant to the discussion. Here, Examiners were looking for specific examples as to how these principles operate on the ground. These could include dealing with issues of new developments in medical science, contemporary moral problems, economic and socio-political debates.

Question 12

There were very mixed answers to this question, with some good examples but also some very weak answers which did not seem to be able to differentiate between private and public activities.

The question demanded detailed discussion of the Shariah in both aspects of life, including examples that are both given and discussed. Examiners were looking for discussions on prescriptive aspects of the Law, what it lays down for individual and communal life, descriptive aspects and how it is employed as a framework for religious life. On the whole, the examples given by many candidates were either too basic or had no specific relationship with the Shariah as such.

Paper 9013/02

Paper 2

General comments

Candidates appeared to have had more difficulty with this paper compared to Paper 1.

The most popular questions were **1, 7, 11** and **12**, while **Questions 3, 9** and **10** were not very popular.

For the most popular questions, even though some of the answers were scanty, they were generally satisfactorily attempted, with candidates showing signs of understanding the topics.

Some candidates wrote mainly in point form without much elaboration. It has to be reiterated that the answers are expected to be in prose and well supported with relevant evidence, especially from the Qur'an and *Hadith* – at least from those provided by the syllabus.

Even if the points made by candidates touched on the theme at hand, they did not always answer the question adequately and so could not always attract sufficient marks for a pass. Furthermore, the standard of some of the answers fell well below that required of A Level candidates, and this has to be addressed urgently. A certain level of maturity is expected so as to make a marked distinction from the O Level.

A few candidates were not able to attempt the required five questions demanded by the paper. This could be attributed to either inadequate preparation or lack of proper time management skills. At this stage, when many might be planning to enter university, some basic skills in time management will stand them in good stead in their next stage on the educational ladder. While the first issue of preparation could be tackled through the normal learning and teaching process, the second issue needs a conscious effort through some practical exercises to make the candidates become used to time management skills. These skills are essential tools in all fields and candidates have to have a sense of it at this stage of their training.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

This was the most popular question and generally well answered, although some candidates concentrated unduly on the early Umayyad rulers while the question was specifically on the later ones. This is possibly due to the perennial problem of candidates not reading the question properly. Even though it could be argued that these early rulers were to stage the tone for the discussion, as a sort of introduction, due priority must be given to the main thrust of the question.

Furthermore, many did not pay much attention to the external factors involved in the problem under discussion. Few, if any, actually challenged the underlying assumption of the question, something that is expected of candidates at this stage. The Examiners were looking for the focus of the discussion from Yazid 11, so anything before that is purely contextual and would not attract serious marks. Again, even though the personal weaknesses of the Caliphs themselves were important, what about the strength of the opposition?

Question 2

The few who attempted this question on the whole did well, but many failed to address the religious aspect of the question and, instead, provided merely descriptive accounts of the events of the Abbasid succession to the Umayyads. Candidates were expected to argue against the claims by the Abbasid that they were restoring the True Faith of Islam after the 'godlessness' of the Umayyads and their use of the Hashim family name to authenticate their claim. However, these were not the only factors and hence the question could have been challenged by providing other (non-religious) factors that could be used to explain their accession to power.

Examiners were looking for points such as: the general weakness of the Umayyads, the collapse of the Unity of their rule, the opportunity taken by Abu Muslim and al-Mansur, and the simple shifts of power from Iran to Syria.

Question 3

Very few candidates answered this question and those who did tended to be confident about the subject matter and provided good answers. Candidates were expected to examine the religious policies of both Caliphs and point out any similarities and differences. Since similarities were likely to be few, the discussion was to focus on: al-Ma'mun's support and promotion of Mu'tazila ideas; the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an; the *Mihna* during which Ahmad ibn Hanbal was publicly flogged; his support for the Shi'a Imam 'Ali al-Rida; al-Mutawakkil's rejection of the Mu'tazila favouring the Hanbalites; his destruction of Shi'a shrines, and his policies against all those who did not agree with his way.

Question 4

This question was not popular at all and even the few who attempted it gave mixed answers. Many simply provided general discussions about the role of the Sunnah with little or no reference to al-Shafi'i. Only a handful of candidates gave some satisfactory answers, often showing a good grasp of the subject.

In part (a), the discussion was expected to focus on the agreement between the two primary sources of law. Details about the background, in which a wider set of precedents were accepted and also the requirement raised by al-Shafi'i's principle for authentic hadiths, were supposed to be presented.

In part (b), the Examiners were looking for comments about the broad differences between Malik and Abu Hanifah. This would include Maliki permission given to the Sunnah of the generation of the prophet's followers, their focus on the Madinan experience, as against the Hanafi permission for a wider use of reasoning. This part was on the whole inadequately answered.

Question 5

Many candidates attempted this question on *tawhid* and provided, on the whole, good general answers. A few, however, gave some exceptional answers showing an in-depth grasp of the subject. The discussions were expected to focus on the Mu'tazili understanding of *tawhid*, where God becomes so strict a unity that the whole essence is almost eroded. In this case, God cannot be depicted in any positive way but only negatively. Answers were expected to include some account of what the Mu'tazilah stood for and some historical description, but the main discussion was to focus on their interpretation of *tawhid*. Those who answered this question often wrote all they knew about the Mu'tazilah, while the question had a particular reference to *tawhid*.

Question 6

This was not among the popular questions and the few who attempted it provided average answers. They often focused so much on the Mu'tazilah that these answers could have conveniently been used for **Question 5**. Many candidates were, however, able to differentiate between the ideas of al-Ash'ari and the Mu'tazilah.

The answers were expected to include some historical and biographical detail, but the focus was supposed to be on what is often referred to as al-Ash'ari's synthesis of mainstream Islamic beliefs and Mu'tazili argumentation. Examiners expected reference to al-Ash'ari's defence of the teachings of the Qur'an as held by the Hanbalis and his use of Mu'tazili forms of reasoning to defend them. His influence stems from his rational upholding of revealed truths.

Question 7

Even though this question on the line of Imams was relatively popular, most of the answers were inadequate. Many did not provide sufficient detail, while others gave very partisan opinions portraying the Shi'a in negative terms. Candidates should be able to show a distance from their own personal beliefs and address the question as asked and not to think in terms of sectarian influences within the community. It is surprising, given the generally poor answers, why so many candidates felt confident to attempt the question at all.

The Examiners were looking for historical accounts of the emergence of belief in Ali and his descendants as Imams and short biographical details of them. Comments were expected to touch on Imams as sources of inspired teachings, the authority and interpretation of the Qur'an, their role in Hadith, as models for living and their acceptance of suffering as part of resistance against evil. It was expected that the Twelfth Imam would receive special mention.

Question 8

Those candidates who attempted this question provided reasonably good answers that addressed the relevant issues. There were some very good and interesting answers.

Candidates were expected to comment on the internalised nature of Sufi beliefs often leading to teachings that played down the importance of outward observances and seen by some people as undervaluing orthodoxy; the importance attached to personal experiences; and also the reverence for the Shaykh above all other aspects of the faith.

Question 9

This was one of the least popular questions and the few who answered it did not do very well. Candidates were expected to discuss the philosophers' attachment to reason and Greek learning, which seemed to be a more important source of knowledge than the Qur'an and other orthodox sources. The controversy arising out of the debates on the place of revelation in their philosophical systems, where reason seemed to have edged out the Qur'an, should have been mentioned. Further, Examiners were looking for good discussions dealing with the fact that the Greek philosophical systems of the Neoplatonists influenced the philosophers and hence imported foreign concepts into Islamic thinking.

Question 10

This question was rarely attempted. This was unfortunate because the topic was about contemporary debate between modernism and traditionalism, and candidates at this stage of their education should certainly be familiar with the basics of such debates.

It was expected that candidates would give some biographical account of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his use of modern rational ideas to express and defend Islam. Examples of some of his ideas regarding education, language learning, development in science and technology and his general views on interpretation of scripture should have been referred to. These were to be held against the Salafi insistence on the self-sufficiency of Islam and a return to the Qur'an and the traditional sources.

Question 11

This question was extremely popular, but the answers were mixed, with many showing negative stereotyping of other religions and their adherents, especially Jews. However, a few candidates provided a good understanding of the topic. It was unfortunate that specific relevant passages were missing. It was expected that the discussion would be a vibrant comment on what the Qur'an teaches about other faiths and how it differs from earlier scriptures. Since the Qur'an is part of the continuum of the religious history of humankind, it has a lot to say about other faiths and its adherents. Key verses should have been mentioned and discussed in the light of the question. Answers could also have discussed how the Qur'an sees itself as the fulfilment of the essence of earlier scripture.

Question 12

This was a very popular question and generally very well answered.

In part **(a)**, candidates were expected to focus on the main teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith about the place of women, their equality with men, responsibilities as Muslims, freedoms in society, duties in partnerships as wives, mothers etc. Quotations from both sources were expected to be cited for support.

In part **(b)**, instead of the wording used in previous papers, where candidates were to comment on implementation of such teachings in "a Muslim country", this time it was to focus on "Muslims in a country you know". This enabled many candidates to focus on issues in their own country without speculating about other places of which they might only have anecdotal knowledge. This time, they were able to be specific, mentioning some very interesting points.

It is, however, still a problem that discussions are not adequately supported by relevant scriptural quotations. The nature of the question demands specific references from the Qur'an and Hadith. At this level of their education, familiarity with some basic passages from the Qur'an and Hadith on the themes in the syllabus should be taken for granted.