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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE (NEW)  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES – CHRISTIANITY  
AND BUDDHISM**

**SUMMER 2018**

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**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**GCSE (NEW)**  
**Summer 2018**  
**CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM**

**PART A – CORE BELIEFS TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES: CHRISTIANITY**

**1. (a) What do Christians mean by ‘incarnation.’**

Most candidates either scored the full two marks, or scored no marks. Candidates who failed to score offered a wide range of answers that covered almost every area of Christian belief and practice. One popular answer, nearly as popular as the correct answer – was to confuse it with reincarnation; and not only for candidates studying Hinduism as their second religion.

Candidates getting half marks often appeared to know the concept well enough, but gave a cursory answer with no development or a simple example. Others tried too hard to explain it off the cuff and tied themselves in knots or strayed from the facts.

Key points here are for candidates to learn/be taught clear and simple definitions; especially important on difficult concepts like this one, where trying to freestyle an answer can lead to confusion.

**(b) Describe Jesus’ teachings on treasure and wealth.**

The full range of marks were earned on this question but too many answers did not appear to know the specific things Jesus taught on this subject. Two very clear passages (and visually memorable passages – moth and rust and thieves breaking in/Lazarus begging at the gate while dogs licked his sores and the rich man in the flames) are cited in the Specification and candidates who knew and used them invariably scored well.

Some made good use of the parable of Lazarus but too many simply gave a potted storyline that lacked application to the topic ... they were credited for it, but missed the opportunity to maximise their score.

Other aspects of Jesus’ teaching got a mention occasionally, such as not serving God and mammon, choosing the narrow path, the widows’ mite, the camel through the eye of a needle. The syllabus has a limited number of prescribed texts, (because schools do not all have the same allocation of curriculum time), but others can embellish an answer and there are some that are visual and memorable, which helps candidates to learn and recall them.

Candidates also brought in biblical passages that did not fit the remit of the question. Job's losses and suffering was popular but is Old Testament and therefore not from Jesus' teachings.

Candidates need to be reminded to stick to the wording of the question. Questions on Jesus' teaching / what the Bible says / what Christians might believe about / Christian attitudes to ... are not variants of the same question (though there will be overlaps). The current question received answers that fitted all of those variants (Old Testament examples, what Christians 'do' etc.), as well as the candidates own thoughts about what Jesus should have said, occasionally slapped in between a set of inverted commas in an attempt to validate it!

Key points here are: what, specifically, is the question asking ... know the given passages (they give clear, information and are often the main difference between a very general answer or full marks).

**(c) Explain Christian beliefs about the nature of humanity.**

Again, candidates either knew this one, or they really struggled. It is a very clear section in the Specification (with wording echoed in this question), a set of clear examples and biblical references anchoring it in the origins of humankind (i.e. Genesis 1-3). One could sense many candidates mentally rolling up their sleeves and thinking that here was something they could really get their teeth into – working through the list, developing a few of them – and scoring highly, limited only by how willing they were to write at length and do justice to the fact that they were trying to earn 8 marks.

Unfortunately, too many appeared not to know what was being asked for. Some thought in terms of being 'humane' and so spoke about sanctity of life and euthanasia (which could earn some credit within an answer that used it as a development of being made in God's image, therefore each life being special and sacred), or tried to work through how Christianity thinks people / humanity should behave, or gave a blow by blow account of the six days of Creation culminating in the creation of humans. They appeared not to recognise the concept posed by the question and tried to interpret the word humanity as best they could; or the word 'nature'.

Again, familiarity with the given Bible passages is crucial.

Questions will endeavour to pick up on the wording given in the Specification (as here, and in the reference to 'treasure' in (b) earlier), so candidates will benefit greatly if they are familiar with it.

**(d) 'Prayer is the most important activity for Christians.'**

The full range of marks were attained in this question. However, too many candidates seemed to score in Bands 1 and 2. A concerning number made no attempt at a question on which so many marks, plus the SPaG bonus were riding.

Good answers included simple definitions of prayer, consideration and analysis of different types of prayer, the importance of prayer, different reasons for praying and advice on how to pray including the Lord's Prayer – all of which was in the Specification and the given biblical references. Others offered some analysis (as the marking Band descriptors ask for), suggesting benefits from prayer and also negatives, such as set prayers becoming mere rote, and the question of prayer vs. action. This was where the better answers began to consider alternative activities and for the best answers to also analyse their relative importance alongside that of prayer.

Many of those answers that were stuck in the lower marking Bands had failed to engage with alternative activities.

Some candidates appeared unable to separate prayer from the wider notions of worship and of attending church or chapel services; they were still able to earn some marks via these more general definitions or circumstances of prayer, but it lost them the opportunity to use these as some easy examples of other more or less important activities that they could have compared or contrasted to prayer.

The (d) question requires a consideration of alternative or different points of view. This can be done by referring to different approaches to the specific issue raised in the question (in this case, prayer). However, this new question is virtually twice the value of the old question (e) in the previous Specifications A and B. It would seem that, to be able to access the higher marks, candidates should be encouraged to look for clear alternatives to discuss, to extend their answer appropriately; especially where the question refers to an extreme, such as 'most important' or to a controversial viewpoint, i.e. what Christian activities might be equally or more important, and why.

Again, care should be taken to follow the wording of the question. This is not about prayer being the most important 'thing', but 'activity' and it is therefore other activities that candidates should consider for comparison; 'just believing in God is the most important thing' is not, in itself, an activity, nor are other 'beliefs' without adding the 'practices' they might lead to.

Other issues that emerged relate to the influence of practices carried over from the previous Specifications, that do not match well with the requirements of this question:

- A number of 'helpful' acronyms, old and new, could be observed in use and in candidates' scribbled notes at the top of their page. FARM was in evidence, as were ADIDAS, RAP and others. These do not necessarily reflect the requirements of the new marking Bands. Also, they might have been suited to a shorter answer, but for a much longer and more valuable answer such as this, they can be misleading and constraining. Some that used these strategies gave answers that were not well suited to the new question.

- For example, candidates using a FARM-like, four part structure, gave answers where much was not relevant. They did not seem to know that the consideration of Humanist and Atheist viewpoints are not requirements of Part A on this paper. There were a significant number of candidates who very carefully looked at the issue of Christian prayer very equitably from the perspective of a Humanist, then of an Atheist, then of a member of another world religion and finally, constituting just one quarter of their answer, from the viewpoint of a Christian. The question did not ask for this, was singularly Christian in its emphasis, and yet they clearly felt this was what they were required to do!

We all need to be sure that we know how the new Specification works and where it is different from the previous ones.

### **SPaG**

This question, 1(d), is of course the one question on the paper where spelling, punctuation and grammar are specifically assessed.

One would hope that candidates take full advantage of up to six bonus marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is strategically attached to their first extended writing question, so that they can be assessed while they are still thinking straight, are not yet worn to a frazzle and aren't yet involved in a mad dash against the clock. For the same reason, if they vary the order in which they answer questions – as some candidates do – 1(d) should still be done early.

However, too many candidates showed little sign of being aware to target those extra six marks here. These avoidable errors were far too common:

- Capital letters (especially to start sentences) and full stops should be a minimum expectation for the vast majority.
- Examiners are bound to pick up on mis-spellings of key subject words such as religion / religious, believe/belief /believer, Christian / Christianity, priest, knowing when to use pray and when to use prayer (a very common error).
- Over-long sentences that lose meaning.
- Candidates whose handwriting tends to flat-line for the final 4 or 5 letters might be advised to pause on, or even print, key words
- Candidates should be encouraged to give 1(d) a quick check (capitals for sentence starter, full stops, proper nouns) before moving on.

A good SPaG score can rescue a mediocre answer.

### **CORE BELIEFS TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES: BUDDHISM**

Candidates need follow the rubric – especially in Questions 3(b), (c) (d) & 4 (b), (c). Some candidates were putting non-religious views everywhere in Q3 & 4.

Key concepts need to be learned.

More emphasis needs to be given to religious language and sources of authority – both of these were lacking in many answers.

Timing – Q4 saw the most number of unanswered questions, possibly due to running out time. However, I didn't see any bullet-pointed answers.

Candidates with better literacy skills tended to do better in the (d) questions. Better use of language tended to allow them to construct arguments that were easier to follow.

The (d) answers need some work – some candidates are self-evaluating their answers rather than making a judgement about the validity of the arguments.

2. (a) The majority of candidates were able to define Wesak and many also gave an example of what might happen during the festival. Some candidates only described what might happen at Wesak without giving a definition of the term.
- (b) This was generally well answered. Candidates were credited for descriptions of any of the events of the early life of the Buddha. Candidates who described the four sights were credited, although the specification only lists pre-birth, prediction and life in the palace as his early life. Candidates who described events after the four sights (specifically renunciation and enlightenment) were not credited. Many candidates did use religious language (e.g. 'dukkha' when describing his father's desire to keep him away from suffering) and a few were able to mention Buddhist scripture as a source of authority for these accounts. The majority of candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of the events (pre-birth, prediction, life in the palace).
- (c) This was generally well answered with candidates explaining each of the Four Noble Truths in some detail and using appropriate religious language (dukkha, tanha, nirodha, magga). Many made reference to the three poisons as causes of suffering along with the Buddha's own experience of the Four Sights. Many candidates were rightly able to use the prompt in the question ('the teachings of the Buddha') as their source of authority. However, reference to the Dhammapada would have been appreciated. Many candidates did use the medical analogy as a way of explaining the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths, which was credited.
- (d) There were a few very good answers to this question from those candidates who engaged with the statement. The better answers used religious language and referred to some sources of wisdom and authority, although no-one mentioned the Dhammapada. Sadly, many students seemed to miss the thrust of the question and just described samatha, metta bhavana and vipassana meditation. Where candidates did well, they used these forms of meditation to make a point. Generally, appropriate alternatives to meditation were given, although some candidates pointed to following the Eightfold Path without seeming to recognise that meditation is part of the Eightfold Path. The better answers usually showed a good level of literacy skills, with candidates making good use of connectives to structure their arguments (e.g. 'however', 'consequently', 'furthermore' etc.). The question does not ask for a personal response, however candidates who gave a personal opinion which linked in to their answer and who backed this up with relevant evidence were credited as they were making a judgement on the issue. Some candidates seem to be confused when evaluating the strength of a particular argument with a few self-evaluating how they themselves had answered the question! The demands of this question are clear: discussion, analysis, evaluation and not just explanation.

## **PART B – RELIGIOUS RESPONSES TO PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES: LIFE AND DEATH / GOOD AND EVIL**

3. (a) Generally answered correctly with a definition and an example. However, many candidates confused it with 'sanctity of life'.
- (b) Candidates need to be aware of the rubric – from Christianity **or** Buddhism - as a few candidates did answer from both. This meant that it was unlikely they reached top marks due to time constraints. Better answers referred to Genesis 1 & 2 and differentiated between stewardship and dominion. References to religious charities were used in an appropriate and effective way.
- (c) The majority of candidates did follow the rubric – Christian **and** Buddhist beliefs. Many candidates gave general answers i.e. going to heaven/good karma if good and hell/bad karma if evil. Better answers got to grips with more complex religious beliefs with some candidates explaining Christian ideas about heaven, purgatory and hell as well as talking about heaven/hell being a state of mind rather than an actual afterlife. Some candidates referred to Christian teachings found within I Corinthians or from a funeral service. In the Buddhism answers, most mentioned samsara and the cycle of death, decay and rebirth of worlds and of different realms of existence. Better answers included the idea of rebirth from moment to moment as well as from life to life. Sadly, many students used the word reincarnation instead of rebirth and wrote at length about being reincarnated as an animal as a result of negative karma. The specification does not use the word reincarnation. It was also a concern that many students wrote about 'going to nirvana' on death, as if nirvana was a place (like heaven) as this showed a lack of understanding. A small number of candidates also referred to Humanist/atheist views about life after death – this is not what the question asked and they need to be aware of the rubric.
- (d) Some candidates understood and engaged with the thrust of this question. The better answers weighed up the arguments by making reference to literal and non-literal interpretations of the Genesis stories and the way that different Christians might respond to them. Some candidates aligned Buddhist views with those of Humanists/atheists by referring to the Big Bang Theory as being acceptable to them. Some candidates were able to make a judgement by looking at whether creation stories still held meaning despite being 'disproved' by science. Less effective answers were descriptive with candidates re-telling the Genesis account of the 7 days of creation. Many candidates dismissed the creation stories because of their personal views regarding science and religion thus failing to engage with the question.
4. (a) Generally, this was not answered well. Many candidates linked justice with revenge or 'getting even' while many failed to answer it at all. Justice is a key concept so a definition and example were expected.
- (b) A lot of candidates did not attempt this question – possibly due to lack of revision or a timing issue. Many candidates were able to describe some aspects of the role of a prison chaplain but many found it difficult to include any religious points. Many answers read as a list so were unable to get higher than Band 2.

- (c)** Most candidates followed the rubric. Some answers included the pacifist views of Quakers towards conflict, and some of the conditions for a Just War. Better answers used the example of Jesus and referred to teachings on forgiveness as well as those on peace. Some candidates understood the term 'conflict' very broadly and wrote about conflict within relationships and examples of forgiveness (e.g. Gee Walker) while others wrote solely about war and peace. Answers from a Buddhist perspective were very general with the link made between pacifism and the first precept. There was no reference made to Buddhist scripture nor to any specific Buddhist peace activities.
- (d)** The candidates who engaged with the statement generally did quite well. Some were able to draw on Buddhist teachings about suffering to make the point that suffering is inevitable. Many found it difficult to show how Christian beliefs might help. Some candidates did use the story of Job, but many who did limited their answer to re-telling the story without making a judgement about its value. The better answers made links across the course, and used themes already discussed in Q1d (prayer) and Q2d (suffering). Weaker answers failed to mention specific religious beliefs. Many answers were very general. The answers of a few candidates were arguments about euthanasia, seemingly indicating that they had learned a pre-prepared answer (for Q3).



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