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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES – UNIT 2:  
CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM  
3120U50-1**

**SUMMER 2023**

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# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## GCSE

Summer 2023

### UNIT 2 CHRISTIANITY

#### General Comments

The paper proved accessible to candidates and the full range of marks were awarded across the paper. There was a range of knowledge of Christianity demonstrated in this examination. This ranged from excellent to weak. There was evidence of some candidates not engaging in the demands of the questions and therefore wrote brief responses. However, there were some excellent responses where candidates had demonstrated their knowledge of Christianity and used sources of authority to support their answers.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

**Q.1 (a) What do Christians mean by 'reason'?**

Most candidates were able to give a definition of the key concept or some form of definition of the key concept. When candidates gained full marks, they were able to define reason as 'doing something' and including some development.

**(b) Describe what happens at a Christian Infant Baptism ceremony.**

There were a range of marks for this question. When candidates responded well and scored in high bands, they used religious language appropriately to support their response. However, some candidates misread the question and wrote about why Infant Baptism takes place. Some answers were very brief and there was some evidence of candidates writing about Believers Baptism rather than Infant Baptism. Disappointingly, few candidates made reference to the use of the font in their response.

**(c) Explain ways in which Christians use the Bible.**

There were some excellent responses about how Christians use the Bible. Some candidates wrote a list, without any explanation. When this happened, the responses were brief, and the description did not contain any explanation. It is important that candidates explain the points they make in order to achieve higher marks. However, it was pleasing to see many candidates using examples to explain the points they made. Where this happened, candidates used religious language extensively, accurately, and appropriately.

**(d) Belief in the afterlife is the most important Christian belief**

There were a range of responses to this question. Some candidates did not fully engage with the belief in the afterlife being the 'most important' belief, so they did not achieve the higher bands. The more able candidates were able to fully analyse and evaluate the importance of the afterlife and provided alternative beliefs as a comparison. Unfortunately, some candidates wrote about what Christians believe about the afterlife and some referred to reincarnation and atheist views in their response.

## **Summary of key points**

It is important that candidates understand the demands of the questions and use religious language appropriately. The 'describe' questions require religious language and a response that is excellent and coherent. For the 'explain' questions, it is important that candidates give a detailed explanation for the points that they make. In the evaluation responses, it is important that candidates fully engage with the demands of the statement. Linking points made, to the statement, ensures that candidates are more evaluative in their response. The use of connectives also helps candidates to structure and unpack arguments.

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES**  
**GCSE**  
**Summer 2023**  
**3120U50-1 UNIT 2 BUDDHISM**

**General Comments**

The exam was accessible, with appropriate coverage from the Specification. The demand was comparable to previous papers, with the full range of marks being awarded. Candidates generally responded well to the questions, showing maturity and confidence in their answers. Generally, candidates showed good knowledge and understanding of the main aspects of Buddhism and a pleasing conceptual understanding of Buddhism. Very few seemed to struggle with the specifics needed to answer questions. Better responses made effective use of this synoptic knowledge and understanding to back up their arguments in the (d) question.

Candidates were well prepared for the themes of (d) question (due to advanced information). Most candidates were able to gain marks for this answer, even if they relied more on knowledge and understanding rather than analysis and evaluation. However, it was particularly pleasing to note continued improvements in the way that (d) questions were answered; candidates again focused on the question asked and constructed arguments which they backed up with well-chosen examples. There was also evidence of candidates using evaluative language when reaching judgements.

**Comments on individual questions/sections**

Q.2 (a) What do Buddhists mean by 'bodhisattva'?

There were many correct answers with candidates using the glossary definition, although this is not a requirement. In a few cases, candidates just defined a bodhisattva as someone who has reached nirvana, omitting that they delay their own enlightenment to help others. Many recognised it as a Mahayana belief. In the main, answers were either right or wrong. Incorrect answers were frequently guesses.

(b) Describe Buddhist teachings about anatta.

On the whole, this was answered well with many candidates using the story of Nagasena and the Chariot to illustrate the Buddha's teachings of no permanent soul. Candidates were also able to link the teachings about the five (s)khandas to the idea of humans constantly changing. Many answers also referred to anicca being the belief of impermanence and were able to identify that the teachings about anatta are part of the Three Marks of Existence. Some candidates seemed unaware of the skill demanded in this question so explained why the teachings of anatta were important rather than describing what they are. A few answers showed confusion with anicca so were unable to move into the higher marking bands.

- (c) Explain why some Buddhists use mantras and mandalas during puja.

Many answers showed good knowledge of mantras **and** mandalas and the reasons for their use – to focus and move closer to enlightenment, and to represent the abode of bodhisattvas and truth of impermanence. The best responses made effective use of religious language (e.g., anicca, dukkha, meditation, enlightenment, bodhisattva). Some candidates were unable to attain the higher bands because their answers lacked balance between both practices, or due to a misunderstanding with mudras. Whilst not such an issue as in Unit 1, some candidates do confuse the skill needed for this question: weaker answers relied on a description of the practices, while others attempted to analyse the importance of mantras and mandalas.

- (d) “For Buddhists, not harming any living being is the most important of the Five Precepts.”

Most candidates answered this question by analysing the relative importance of this Precept with one of the other Precepts. Many responses were focused and demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding of many Buddhist concepts, teachings, and practices. It was pleasing to see many excellent responses with candidates being able to confidently refer to the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, and make links with abortion, euthanasia, death penalty, pacifism, and sexual relationships. Many candidates were also to make clear and supported judgements, often concluding that no one Precept is **most** important. Although weaker answers tended to be more generic without giving specific details of the Precepts, candidates were still able to offer more than one point of view.

### Summary of key points

- Most candidates were well prepared, and many were able to use their knowledge and understanding of the course in a confident manner.
- Although not as much of an issue as in Unit 1, candidates still need to be reminded of the skills required for each question: description in (b) questions, explaining in (c) questions and analysing and evaluating in (d) questions. Sticking to the required skills should enable answers to move into higher bands.
- Regarding the (d) questions, candidates are still advised to read the statements carefully to tailor specific subject content. Some candidates underline or highlight specific words in a question (e.g. ‘most important’) while others might draft a plan of the points they intend to make – both of these can help a candidate focus.

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES

## GCSE

Summer 2023

### UNIT 2 ETHICS

#### General Comments

#### Questions 3 and 4 – Religion and Ethical Themes

The paper proved to be accessible to candidates and the full range of band descriptors and marks were awarded across the paper. This section of the paper (Q3 and Q4) required candidates to answer some questions from two perspectives or select the religious perspective they wished to write about, namely Christianity and a second religious tradition. At times, there was a noticeable difference in the quality of the responses from different religions when put side by side. Candidates sometimes confused ideas between the two religious traditions or tended to favour one more than the other, where their understanding of the religion and its traditions/beliefs was shown to be stronger. This was more noticeable in (c) responses.

Many candidates appeared confident in their use of key terminology in this section of the paper and were able to offer insight and understanding into the meaning of key terms. It was also pleasing to note across the paper in Q3 and Q4, an increased use of reference to sources of wisdom and authority and in some cases, successful interpretation of their meaning or recognition of diversity of religious views in their interpretation. There was no requirement in this paper for candidates to include reference to non-religious traditions in their responses to the (d) questions although many chose to do so and did this effectively, offering a moral, philosophical or ethical alternative perspective. At times, however, it appears that views were underdeveloped or tokenistic as though candidates were following a rubric rather than thinking for themselves of whether the viewpoint was relevant to the question posed. Some candidates also struggled to show specific understanding of the key elements of the demands of each question style; for example, distinguishing between a (b) question where description is required and a (c) question where explanation is required. It was also concerning to see that a number of candidates chose not to attempt some questions or gave very brief and underdeveloped responses.

The provision of 'Summer 2023 advanced information' proved to be very useful to candidates in their revision and preparing for the highest tariff AO2 questions in this section of the paper. These were answered more fully with many candidates giving detailed extended writing responses.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

#### PART B – Relationships

##### **Q.3 (a) What is meant by 'responsibilities'?**

The majority of candidates were successfully able to offer understanding of this term, specifically linking it to ideas of duties or obligations that need to be carried out. The best answers also qualified this by adding a relevant example. A small number of candidates confused the terms of 'responsibilities' with 'roles' and some chose not to attempt this question.

**(b) Describe, from Christianity or Buddhism, the purpose of marriage.**

Candidates appeared to be confident in answering this question with many able to talk meaningfully about the purpose of marriage and give multiple ideas, often related also to the nature of marriage; all were credited. It is encouraging to note that very few candidates answered this from both religions meaning they understood the requirement of this style of question. Furthermore, often religious terminology and teachings were specific and relevant to the religion chosen by the candidate which is very pleasing. Weaker responses tended to simply state understanding of marriage being the correct context to have children or be 'together forever', but more developed responses which achieved the higher bands, reference multiple further ideas and described how these beliefs were shown in the views of marriage from the religious tradition.

**(c) Explain Christian and Buddhism teachings about the nature and purpose of sex.**

There was a full range of responses seen to this question; the best answers took each religious tradition separately and fully explained its teachings, making use of reference to relevant and appropriate sources of wisdom and authority. It was good to see on occasion, awareness of diversity of views within a religion or multiple interpretations of teachings. Weaker answers tended to focus more on just one religion, usually Christianity, or take both religions together and show similarity between them without always stating the evidence of both views in a balanced way. Some answers unfortunately simply described beliefs or teachings without development.

**(d) 'It is difficult to be married to someone from a different religious tradition.'**

Responses to this question were mixed with a significant number of candidates simply focusing on similarities and differences between the actual marriage ceremonies of two religions and identifying why this may make it easy or difficult for a couple to marry. More developed responses successfully identified specific issues that may arise for a couple from different religions (or even if one partner was non-religious) that were relevant to the religions they were studying. The best responses, which were awarded the top marks, used a multitude of arguments varying from issues interfaith marriage may cause within the extended family group, specific challenges such as raising children and in contrast, how couples may overcome these issues so they wouldn't cause problems within the relationship/marriage. Many candidates offered extended answers in response to this question and were able to evaluate views given in order to come to some conclusion about the diversity of views on this statement.

## PART B – Human Rights

**Q.4 (a) What is meant by 'absolute poverty'?**

This question was generally attempted and well answered by the majority of candidates who were able to identify that 'absolute poverty' was a complete lack of basic necessities. The best responses qualified this by offering an example such as food or water. A small minority of candidates offered a very brief understanding of this phrase focusing on a 'person having nothing' without any development and a few confused 'absolute' poverty with the phrase 'relative poverty'.

- (b) **Describe how religious believers promote human rights.**  
This question tended to be approached by candidates in one of two ways; they either focused on offering a general understanding of generic actions religious believers have done such as campaigns, petitions, using the media, etc *or* by focusing specifically on examples of people who have promoted human rights such as Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King, Malala, etc. Both these approaches were credited using the band descriptors. Candidates generally coped well with this question and were able to identify a multitude of ways that religious believers have promoted human rights; the best answers offered a description of each way before moving onto the next although weaker candidates tended to list ideas or simply state them without any sort of context. A small number of candidates appeared to misinterpret the question and focused on *why* religious believers promoted human rights rather than *how* they acted.
- (c) **Explain how a Christian and Buddhism charity work to reduce poverty.**  
This question appears to have been misunderstood by many candidates with a significant number focusing on charitable *actions* performed by religious believers rather than the work of a *specific charity* in each of the two religions studied; both have been credited in application of the band descriptors. Many candidates talked generally about how religious believers work to help others through reducing poverty and used religious teachings to support the reasons for the actions they performed. The best answers stated the name of a religious charity and went on to explain the work of that charity as well as identifying the motivation and religious teaching behind the work, doing this for both religions of study. Some weaker candidates only stated basic actions and did not develop their responses beyond basic description. A number of candidates chose not to offer any answer to this question.
- (d) **‘Religious believers should do more to stop prejudice and discrimination’.**  
Some responses to this question wasted time at the start of their response offering definitions of ‘prejudice’ and ‘discrimination’ which were the terms used in the statement, rather than offering arguments linked to the statement. Weaker responses from candidates tended to simply focus on religious beliefs about prejudice and discrimination, often stating these from the two religions they had studied before suggesting this was why religious believers should challenge prejudice and discrimination in the world. Some good answers did make explicit reference to individuals who had stood up and fought against prejudice and discrimination, such as Martin Luther King. The best responses to this question were those that showed awareness of the work done by religious individuals and groups and used this as a basis to suggest religious believers *should do more or couldn’t do any more* to help, often referring to the fact that some religious believers in the past had lost their lives due to their fight or that everyone/the government perhaps needed to do more.

## Summary of key points

- Candidates must be encouraged to learn all key terms and use them not only when required to give definitions, but also within all responses where terminology can be used to reflect understanding of key ideas.
- Candidates should be reminded to read the words of the question carefully and use the wording of the question in their responses to help direct their answers towards success. They should also make sure that they try not to 'blanket' content and focus on what the question is asking to be able to access the higher bands.
- Candidates need to respond to the specific demands of each style of question; in (b) style questions, candidates are required to give only a **description** whereas in (c) style questions candidates are required to give an **explanation**. Often inclusion of the word 'because' in c style responses will help to develop explanation skills beyond descriptive responses.
- Furthermore in (c) style responses in Q3 and Q4, candidates should be reminded of the need of 'balance' between the two religious traditions they have studied; responses where the demand is to know the content from two religious traditions should do so in equal measure.
- In all d style responses, candidates must remember to include a range of views with appropriate lines of arguments that they should reflect on, to offer a critical evaluative approach to the statement provided. Use of connectives and evaluative language in responses will help to achieve this. For Q3 and Q4, candidates should be reminded to offer *different* views which may, or may not necessarily be, agree and disagree.



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