



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE (NEW)
RELIGIOUS STUDIES – UNIT 2:
CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM**

SUMMER 2019

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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UNIT 2: CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM

General Comments

This paper had a relatively small entry of just over 300 candidates. Although examiners thought that the standard of answers had improved, many candidates did seem to find the exam challenging. The paper differentiated between different levels of responses given by candidates through the use of the full range of marks awarded. Overall, although examiners thought that the standard of answers had improved, many candidates did seem to find the exam challenging. Some candidates did not attempt some of the higher tariff questions, possibly due to a lack of preparation or due to timing constraints. Other candidates, however, were able to demonstrate thorough knowledge and understanding, and it was pleasing to see some well-written, mature responses throughout the paper, but particularly for the 'd' answers. Specific religious language was usually a feature of the better answers, but references to sources of wisdom and authority were often limited to only the few excellent answers.

Comments on individual questions/sections

PART A – Core Beliefs, Teachings and Practices – Christianity

Q.1 (a) Most candidates were able to score one or two marks on this question. Responses referred to infant baptism or adult/believer's baptism, or both. Some attempted to describe a baptism ceremony: the content covered usually hit some points relevant to the question, but the length of such answers, and the time spent on them were unnecessary.

(b) Many candidates were able to talk about Heaven and Hell, with basic statements of criteria for getting there and what those places might be like. However, this is not likely to achieve more than a Band 2 / 2-3 marks ('a good, generally accurate description').

For candidates who have been taught to self-assess their answers (not a bad skill to teach and practise with them), they should be aware that marking does not rely on 'penny points' which, on a question like this one, could quickly accumulate five such points; but is based on bands of response, where the top band refers to 'excellent, coherent' and 'awareness and insight'.

A key point here is the need for candidates to know a range of key words / concepts to provide the skeleton of the answer. They should not restrict the answer to the basic and obvious ideas – bearing in mind those requirements of the top band.

(c) Candidates did well on this question. They were able to explain ways in which the place of worship held meaning for them, enabled them to participate in worship, provided aids to worship, support of others, guidance from leaders and opportunities to serve others, both within and beyond the church/chapel.

Where some candidates tripped up was in treating this as an evaluation and discussing why one doesn't really need to go to a place of worship. This unfortunately, guided them away from what the question was asking them to explain.

In context of such an evaluative response, some candidates offered alternative places where God could be worshipped, such as at home or going on pilgrimage. Where these were just used as an example to back up the evaluative point, they were not credited, as they miss the clear emphasis of the question. However, where a candidate developed the point, for example, with a place in the home specifically given over to private worship, or a designated place of worship attended on pilgrimage (such as the Church of the Nativity, or St David's Cathedral) credit was given. However, such answers, by their nature, tended to be limited – and candidates always run that risk when they choose to veer away from the more obvious point of the question (which will have been chosen with the mark tariff for the question in mind).

- (d)** The full range of marks were awarded for this question. Candidates appeared to find it a relatively easy question to access.

Good answers contained discussion and counter arguments, recognising that the statement is not about the Bible, it's about ways to 'live their life for God'. The Bible is a helpful place to start, and can give them lots to say, but the best 'd' responses will always be the ones that break away from a simple assessment of the pros and cons of a single idea, to a discussion that shows detail and analysis across a range of ideas.

Some appeared to rush their reading of the question and so ended up focusing on the wrong things; focusing on individual parts of the statement rather than understanding it as a whole:

- E.g. just seeing 'Bible' – rather than 'Bible's teachings' – so they took it as 'reading the Bible', which got a thumbs down as being too passive. Others clearly didn't understand that 'teachings' often focus on what one does / how one lives (the rest of the statement - 'are all a Christian needs to live their life' - does make that clear) and so rejected the statement as resulting in Christians doing nothing (other than, again, just reading the Bible).
- Again, many candidates seemed to have poor awareness of what the teachings of the Bible might include. Quite a few thought that Christians should ignore the Bible and concentrate instead on following the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus!
- Others just saw 'to live their life' – so the statement is rejected because it can't teach you important skills for life, like how to cook, or drive, or how to get a good job.
- Others simply reacted against the idea that one should live their life for anyone else and took great pains and time to argue this. Candidates must accept that there may be certain 'givens' built into the question. This question takes it as a given that a Christian will in some way and to some extent try to live their life for God. There were candidates who threw away time and marks by wanting to argue the point that no-one should have to live for someone else, God wouldn't want us to, he gave us free will so we wouldn't have to etc. They simply showed their lack of understanding of the effect of having a religious belief.

- Too many had a limited appreciation of how a believer's perspective, commitment and choices might be affected. They seemed unable to conceive that someone would, or should be expected to, live their life for anyone other than themselves. After all, we only have one life! – forgetting what they had already written about Christian beliefs for question 'b'.

Again this year, some candidates still thought they were required to include the views of other religions, and non-religious beliefs. Candidates are not penalised for this, but neither do they gain credit. Time and marks are wasted unnecessarily. Candidates' jottings showed that they were often working to rubrics and acronyms that included a requirement for this type of response.

One concept that centres might consider revisiting is that of 'free will'. Too often, candidates use it as a cop out: a glib conclusion to a point, which side-steps a proper analysis of conflicting ideas. It is commonly used, but not often well understood. Many use it as if it means you have permission to do as you please; rather than as bearing responsibility for one's choices.

SPaG

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

It is hoped 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.

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. Names, and especially titles, were regularly not given a capital letter.
- Examiners are bound to pick up on misspellings 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 or have no internal punctuation. An assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar does not just spot-mark errors but takes account of how overall meaning is affected.
- This year, it often seemed that answers showed little evidence of candidates making a conscious effort to be at their best on this question. Choosing short-cuts, such as writing numbers as numerals rather than words, or putting a simple cross instead of writing the word 'and' were common evidence of this.
- Quotes were often inserted into sentences with no thought as to how one should punctuate their presence. Or they appeared as a stand-alone sentence, even if the quote only amounted to a phrase.

A good SPaG score can rescue a mediocre answer. Also, any attempt that scores at all for content, can receive up to the full SPaG mark, if the answer provides enough evidence.

PART A – Core Beliefs, Teachings and Practices – Buddhism

- Q.2 (a)** Most candidates found this to be an accessible question. Candidates who had revised the key terms were able to give an accurate definition, although some candidates did confuse it with anatta. Candidates were awarded one mark if they just stated that anicca was one of the Three Marks of Existence. A number of candidates did not attempt this question. Key words form an essential part of the study as they underpin the concepts that candidates need in order to answer questions on Buddhism.
- (b)** This question offered many opportunities for candidates to do well and, where candidates had learned this topic, they tended to offer thorough descriptions of a range of ways that Buddhists might worship at a shrine in the home, including reference to the objects that could be used. However, some candidates who were less prepared tended to include meditation or worship at temples so limited the amount of marks they could achieve. Some candidates seem to find the skill required in this question challenging and they tended to slip into explanation when they needed to focus on a description of what Buddhists might do when they worship at a shrine at home. Some candidates did show good understanding of why worshipping at home was important but lacked a coherent description, although credit was given to good descriptions that had elements of explanation.
- (c)** This question allowed candidates the freedom to answer in a variety of ways – answers could include a general explanation of the role of the Five Precepts as a whole, or they could have given explanations of each precept. Some very good answers gave detailed explanations of the purpose and function of the precepts, with some candidates producing mature, extended answers that looked at each precept in turn. Although there were some outstanding, detailed answers that required extra pages, candidates do need to remember that this is an eight-mark question and they should think about the amount of time they are dedicating to it. Many candidates found this question difficult and struggled to produce answers that reached the higher bands, with some merely listing each of the Five Precept. Some candidates used evaluative language when explaining, they need to be aware of the specific skill required.
- (d)** This question was not attempted by some candidates and many candidates did struggle to engage in any critical discussion of the issue. The weakest answers were descriptions of the life of a monk, and sometimes included information about Christian monks. Other answers were limited to the lower bands because candidates merely explained what the question was asking without considering the arguments about whether Buddhist monks are isolated or part of society. Some candidates were able to use their knowledge of many aspects of the course to produce detailed, mature evaluations; these answers often referred to the differences in the monastic Sangha in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, and how social action is integral for some monks and nuns. Some candidates appeared to follow a structure when answering; sadly, this formulaic approach can hinder some capable candidates who would be able to engage more fully with the statement. Some of these formats included a paragraph explaining the life and role of Theravada monks, a paragraph explaining the life and role of Mahayana monks and a paragraph of the candidate's view of Buddhist monks: this type of answer included very little, if any, analysis and no judgements on the validity of the statement.

PART B – Religious Responses to Ethical Themes

- Q.3** (a) This was generally well answered with many candidates being able to give a suitable definition.
- (b) This question required candidates to describe attitudes to same sex **relationships** from Christianity **or** Buddhism, yet some candidates referred to same sex marriages and/or both religions in their answers. Better answers referred to the teachings in scriptures (e.g. Leviticus 18:22) and were able to show how these affected attitudes. Fewer candidates referred to Buddhist attitudes with some stating that same sex relationships are fine within Buddhism as there is no god to answer to. Some candidates did slip into explanations but, where they did not hinder the description, candidates were still able to reach the higher bands.
- (c) This question required candidates to consider specific religious teachings and explain the practices that come from these teachings. However, there were many generic responses with little use of specific religious language or relevant sources of authority showing weak knowledge and understanding. Some candidates included an explanation of religious attitudes to abortion as a form of contraceptive. Many candidates concentrated on Christian attitudes and were unable to offer Buddhist attitudes, so their answers were unbalanced and unable to reach the higher bands. The better answers offered detailed explanations of Catholic attitudes and practices and made reference to Buddhist teachings of ahimsa and dukkha.
- (d) The question asked if 'men and women should play equal roles in **worship**' but many candidates limited their responses to a discussion on equality and sex discrimination and failed to refer to roles within worship. More worryingly, some candidates reverted to stereotypes regarding gender roles. Many answers were generic and lacked specific references to religion. Some responses were formed from paragraphs that included 'some Christians think / some Buddhists think / but / I think' with nothing tying in the explanations to make it a more evaluative answer. Other answers included a lot of analysis but lacking in knowledge of religious teachings and attitudes. Better answers included sources of authority such as the number of rules set out for Buddhist monks and nuns in the Pali Canon (Vinaya Pitaka).
- Q.4** (a) A number of candidates did not attempt this question, and there were some disappointing responses to this question with many candidates appearing unaware of the key concept. As previously stated, key words are an important part of the course.
- (b) This question required candidates to describe the attitudes to Christians **or** Buddhists to the **use** of wealth. Again, some candidates did not read the question carefully and wrote about both religions, while other answers were generic and failed to use specific religious language. Some candidates mentioned the gaining of wealth and attitudes to being wealthy without focussing on how Christians or Buddhists should be using their wealth. Better answers included descriptions of a parable (e.g. the Rich Man and Lazarus) and how this influenced Christian attitudes, or of Gautama's experiences following his renunciation and how this influenced his teaching on the Middle Way.

- (c) A number of candidates did not attempt this question despite it appearing to be fairly straightforward. Although most candidates showed an understanding of what was meant by the discrimination, there were many disappointing generic responses with not enough specific knowledge and understanding of the teachings from each religion. There were few references to specific teachings or sources of authority. Many candidates explained the role of Martin Luther King in the fight against racial discrimination, and some were able to link this to Christian teachings, such as Galatians 3:27-29. Some candidates were able to explain teachings on dukkha and metta and how this impacted on attitudes to discrimination. Candidates need to recognise that this question asks for an explanation and that evaluative language is unnecessary here.
- (d) Many candidates either did not attempt this question or they ran out of time. A number of answers concentrated on the idea that everyone should have the freedom to express their ideas, so ended up being generic and lacking a focus on the expression of specific religious beliefs. Many candidates did not use religious or ethical language and were unable to refer to sources of wisdom and authority. Sadly, there was evidence of stereotypes within some answers, especially if the candidate wrote about religious extremism. Many candidates did write about the Golden Rule, but this was sometimes the only time they included reference to religion or used religious language. Better answers engaged with the statement with candidates backing up their views e.g. by referring to Oscar Romero or Martin Luther King, persecution of Rohingya Muslims by Buddhists in Myanmar.

Summary of key points

- Be aware of the demands of the different questions – describe, explain, discuss. Some candidates are explaining in a 'b' question, evaluating in a 'c' question and explaining in a 'd' question.
- The use of key words and specialist language and references to sources of wisdom and authority essential in both Part A and Part B.
- The more effective 'd' answers select appropriate information and use evaluative language when justifying arguments.



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