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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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

**SUMMER 2018**

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## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

### GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2018

#### OPTION C – CHRISTIANITY AND HINDUISM

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

**(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: HINDUISM

Answers, especially in the extended writing parts of the question were lacking in detail. Knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs and concepts were generally superficial and this in turn had a detrimental effect on the standard of the evaluation question. It seems that some centres did not cover the whole specification. However there were some examples of very good scripts showing thorough knowledge and understanding of religious belief and content and being able to evaluate in a mature and intelligent way the influence of religious belief on practice.

- Q.2**
- (a)** Most candidates were able to explain what 'puja' means to Hindus although some did not gain the two marks available because they only gave a one word answer – worship. This was awarded one mark and the other given to an answer which qualified worship in some way e.g. 'it can be done at home or in the mandir' or 'worship of a god/goddess/murti'.
  - (b)** Most candidates were familiar with the Trimurti and there were some good descriptions of their nature. However some candidates did not have enough detailed knowledge to gain the 5 marks available. There needed to be a description rather than listing – creator, preserver, destroyer. Others did not observe the trigger word 'Describe' and described their importance in Hinduism.
  - (c)** Some candidates answered this question very well and focused on the specific importance of Varanasi as a place of pilgrimage giving specific examples of some of the practices and explaining their importance e.g. throwing of ashes into the Ganges to ensure a quicker access to Moksha. However a number of candidates were obviously unfamiliar with Varanasi and therefore gave general answers on the importance of pilgrimage in general. Whilst parts of these answers could be credited they were not able to attain the higher bands.
  - (d)** Generally this was not a well answered question mainly for the reasons outlined in the opening paragraph. Knowledge and understanding of bhakti was very patchy and a number of candidates could go no further than stating that it was loving devotion to God. There was no mention of why bhakti was important and the features that make it different to other forms of worship. Others wrongly stated that it was only performed by Shaivites. Most candidates could only argue against the statement in a superficial way either by referring to puja or listing anything and anyone connected in any way with Hinduism as being more important. There was no reference to specific forms of worship such as darshan or congregational puja.

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

- Q.3**
- (a)** Surprisingly a number of candidates did not know the meaning of 'quality of life' and many referred to 'sanctity of life'. There were a number of very vague answers.
  - (b)** The answers were generally superficial in content. A number of candidates ignored the word 'or' and tried to give Christian and Hindu attitudes. Both were as poor as each other. There was generally a lack of reference to beliefs and practices and practical implementations of these attitudes.
  - (c)** On the whole this was one of the better answered questions and candidates seemed familiar with some of the Christian and Hindu beliefs about life after death. There was generally a better understanding of Hindu beliefs than Christian beliefs which very often included no more than heaven being for good people and hell for the evil. There was no understanding of the concept of judgement or of the role of faith. The Hindu explanations referred to the atman, samsara, reincarnation and the role of karma.
  - (d)** The performance on this question was very mediocre. Many candidates failed to understand the question. Others described creation stories without any evaluation at all in the context of the question. The references to non-religious views were very superficial and simplistic and there was very little attempt to compare them with religious views. A number of candidates referred to the Big Bang and Darwin's evolution without any real understanding of these concepts and how they challenge some religious beliefs. Others were able to refer to literal and non-literal views but did not link them to the question at all.
- Q.4**
- (a)** Many of the answers given were vague and general and it was surprising to see so many candidates not use the word 'fair' in their explanation. Many linked the word 'justice' to people being punished for their crimes. This can be part of justice but it should be noted that there is a difference between justice and revenge.
  - (b)** This was one of the worst answered questions with candidates either having no idea whatsoever what a prison chaplain is or interpreting them as prison reformers and giving a description of the work of Elizabeth Fry.
  - (c)** This question was interpreted by many as taking part in a war and as such was well answered. Many were familiar with the concept of a Just War in Christianity and that some Christians are pacifists. They were also able to refer to some relevant teaching. In Hinduism candidates were familiar with the concept of ahimsa and the work of Gandhi. They also referred to the conditions of war in the Rig Veda and the role of dharma especially in the context of the Kshatriyas.
  - (d)** This on the whole was a poorly answered question with many candidates focusing on why God cannot help those who are suffering and then discussing arguments for and against the existence of God. There were very few references to non-religious views (which, whilst not compulsory for this question, would have been relevant and credit-worthy) and the religious views given were very superficial and narrow in content.



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