



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE (NEW)
RELIGIOUS STUDIES – UNIT 1:
CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM**

SUMMER 2019

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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UNIT 1: CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM

General Comments

The number of entries increased from last year's very small entry. The entry was a mix of candidates who had followed the course in limited lesson time and others who had studied Buddhism as part of an option group with appropriate dedicated learning time. Many candidates found the exam to be challenging and either resorted to guesswork or did not attempt to answer. Other candidates 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.

Comments on individual questions/sections

PART A – Core Beliefs, Teachings and Practices - Christianity

Q.1 (a) Most candidates scored one or two marks on this question. The best answers were often the most succinct; simple statement of definition, followed by example or development. For this type of question that is all that is required and an attempt to explain the concept of the Trinity is unlikely to make the answer any clearer. Some theological terms were specifically created as faith 'statements', because the concept in question is a mystery beyond full human understanding. The question does not ask for an explanation. Equally, an extended answer uses up valuable time at this stage of the examination; candidates shouldn't really need to fill the space for just two marks; and they certainly shouldn't be taking their answers over to the additional pages (as some did).

(b) The full range of marks were awarded on this question.

The main cause of concern was candidates not paying close enough attention to what the question was actually asking for. This might have been due to a rushed reading of the question, or to a failure to grasp the importance of the concept being highlighted. Consequently, answers often chose to describe simply beliefs about 'Jesus'; or to misjudge the skill being tested and attempt to 'explain why' Christians believe Jesus was the Messiah. In both cases, candidates might happen to include relevant material, for which they were credited; but the overall answer was unlikely to score highly, and sometimes not at all. Some candidates appeared not to have a specific awareness of the word 'Messiah', equating it simply with being 'special'. Candidates who recognised and engaged with the word, invariably scored well.

There were also candidates who felt the need to refer to the beliefs of other religions and of Humanists and Atheists!

(c) The full range of marks was awarded on this question. Virtually every candidate who attempted the question earned some credit, however, there were a few limiting factors.

For example, candidates who simply gave an account of the biblical Creation narrative were only credited at Band 1; this was a description, where the question asks for an explanation. Similarly, responses that only dealt with the creation of the world, but neglected the creation of human beings, could not score at the highest band; the full question needs to be covered.

Examples of where candidates added explanation to Creation narrative were by going into aspects of the nature of humanity, or by highlighting ways in which the Genesis account might be interpreted by different Christian groups (and their responses to scientific theories of our origins). However, on that latter point of the views of different Christian interpretations of Genesis, there did seem to be an over-emphasis. Many simply referred, usefully, to two different approaches: literalist and non-literalist. Others appeared to see this as the most important factor in answering the question, with some attempting to explain up to eight different approaches (which often didn't seem to be very different at all). In any such question, candidates fare better when equipped with a few variants which they can explain and apply well, rather than a raft of alternatives that dominate and shift the focus of the question.

- (d) The full range of marks were awarded on this question. Many found it easy to access because they were coming to it fresh from the question on Creation and so made a link to stewardship and caring for the world/planet. This was not necessarily the main thrust of this question but is a perfectly acceptable answer which was developed profitably by many candidates. However, as is invariably the case with the (d) question, the best responses cover a range of alternatives, responding critically to phrases such as 'most important' by also considering what else might be important for a Christian to focus on. Candidates explored issues of working for the good of others, acts of agape, spreading the Gospel message, working for charity; also alternative duties, such as love of family before the world, love of God before love of neighbour, the next world before this temporary world etc.

As with last year, a concerning number of candidates mistakenly felt that they were expected to include the views of other religions and non-religious views from Humanists and Atheists. Side notes that candidates jotted on their papers showed that they were often working to specific rubrics or acronyms that required this type of response! Candidates are not penalised for this, but some wasted half of their response, and a fair bit of their valuable time, for no credit. Candidates really need to be reminded as to where they should take account of this requirement, and where not. It is even creeping into (b) and (c) answers.

The terms 'literal' and 'non-literal' Christian figured heavily in this question too. Many candidates appeared to see it as an organising principle that can be applied to any aspect of Christianity. Some seemed to have a rather caricatured view of Christian believers seen through this particular prism; for some it was being treated as 'believe anything and everything' against 'don't really believe anything at all'. They are equipped with terms they don't always appear to properly understand and, therefore, do not always apply appropriately.

Clearly centres have been teaching structured approaches to the (d) question. These are supporting candidates to give answers that develop and analyse a range of ideas.

Although, for some, it was more of a tick box exercise, where moving through a set sequence took the place of offering genuine alternative views for analysis.

Many candidates used sources of authority to back up or exemplify a point. This was mostly through biblical quotes. However, some would simply parachute in quotes or name a parable, as if just the title will make the point. Quotes and references are really important; but they need to be clearly applied to the point being made.

SPaG

This question, 1(d), 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.

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)** Candidates who had revised the key terms were able to give an accurate definition although some wrote very detailed definitions that were more than necessary for a two-mark answer. Examiners were surprised that this question was attempted by only about 75% of the candidates. Key words form an essential part of the study as they underpin the concepts that candidates need to be aware of. Use of key words also tend to improve the quality of all answers.
- (b)** Where candidates had learned this topic, they tended to do well describing a range of ways that Buddhists might celebrate Wesak and there were some very good, detailed descriptions.

However, candidates who were less prepared tended to limit their answers to when Wesak took place and what it commemorated.

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 how Buddhists celebrate Wesak.

Some candidates did show good understanding of why Wesak is celebrated but lacked a coherent description, although credit was given to good descriptions that had elements of explanation.

- (c) Many candidates found this question difficult and struggled to produce answers that reached the higher bands. Many seemed to mis-read or misunderstand the question and wrote about general challenges to religious people rather than to specific Buddhist teachings. Candidates had the freedom to choose from a number of Buddhist teachings (e.g. tanha, dukkha) yet many answers included general issues such as prejudice and discrimination, or attitudes to abortion and euthanasia without linking these to Buddhist teachings. Better answers did refer to difficulties in following Buddhist teachings due to a lack of temples and other Buddhists or living in a materialistic culture that conflicts with the teaching of tanha. Some candidates were able to explain certain teachings of the Eightfold Path in considerable detail, while others merely described each part of the Eightfold Path. Some candidates used evaluative language when explaining, they need to be aware of the specific skill required.
- (d) Although this was a straightforward question, many candidates struggled to engage in any critical discussion of the issue. The weakest answers were frequently only descriptions of the Four Sights. Other answers were limited to the lower bands because candidates explained why the Four Sights and another part of the Buddha's life were important without analysing whether one event was more important than the other. Many candidates showed a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the life of the Buddha and, with the use of some evaluative language, they would have been able to move up the bands. 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. The better answers were discussions of the various events in the Buddha's life with judgements made on the validity of each. Disappointingly, even the better answers sometimes lacked specialist language and sources of wisdom and authority.

PART B – Religious Responses to Philosophical Themes

- Q.3** (a) This was generally well answered although some candidates found difficulty in expressing clearly what they knew and understood in their writing.
- (b) This question required candidates to refer to 'religious believers' so responses from a particular religion or religions per se were credited. There were many non-attempts for this question even though candidates would have gained some credit for generic ways that people support global citizenship. Many responses focussed on **why** religious believers might support global citizenship with detailed references to creation stories, rather than **how** they might support global citizenship.

- (c) There were many generic responses with little use of specific religious language or relevant sources of authority. Many candidates concentrated on Christian attitudes and were unable to offer Buddhist ideas so their answers were unbalanced and unable to reach the higher bands.
- (d) The question asked if 'euthanasia is always wrong' but the majority of candidates limited their responses to a discussion on the argument for and against euthanasia. Many candidates made reference to religious beliefs with regard to sanctity of life, although few used any sources of authority to support such references. There was often a limited understanding of Humanism and a confused understanding of atheism. Candidates only need to refer to one non-religious tradition in their responses, but they are expected to deploy an understanding of the non-religious tradition. Many references were made to Humanists believing in euthanasia as, like Buddhists, they don't believe in a creator God and therefore life does not matter.

Some responses were formed from four paragraphs consisting of a paragraph on Christianity, one from Buddhism, one from Humanism and one from their own views. This structure makes it very difficult to reach the level of analysis and evaluative discussion required.

- Q.4**
- (a) There were some disappointing responses to this question with many candidates appearing unaware of the key concept or writing a generic response about peace.
 - (b) This question required candidates to describe any example of forgiveness from one of the religions studied. References were made to founders e.g. Jesus, the Buddha and Angulimala; stories from sacred texts e.g. Prodigal Son; or contemporary situations e.g. Martin Luther King, Gae Walker.
 - (c) Although most candidates showed an understanding of what was meant by the Death Penalty, there were many disappointing generic responses which did not reflect the integrity of two different religions or religious traditions. There were few references to specific teachings or sources of authority. Some candidates produced an evaluative type answer stating arguments for and against the Death Penalty, but containing little specific explanation concerning the beliefs of two different traditions on the subject. Some candidates also seemed to think that they need to state that one of the traditions was for the Death Penalty and the other against - (d) questions do not require candidates to compare the attitudes from the two traditions but just to explain the distinctive attitudes.
 - (d) The majority of responses gave some justification regarding the virtues of reform in relation to other forms of punishment, such as retribution. Some responses included reference to the work of prison chaplains. It was noticeable that for a significant minority of candidates they did not perceive reform as an aim of punishment. Some candidates wrote an entirely secular response with no reference to any religious teachings or use of religious language. The statement refers to the 'main aim of punishment' so a comparison with the other aims of punishment would be creditworthy. However, some candidates limited their answers to describing the different forms of punishment with no evaluative discussion.

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 & Part B.
- The more effective (d) answers select appropriate information and use evaluative language when justifying arguments.



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